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of the American Girl

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Sanna's Star of Love

All the world adoring at her feet, the screen's newest star still must seek the one love that could bring her heart's content

By Priscilla Gailey

COMPLETE NOVELETTE

IT was three o'clock on a pale gold May afternoon. Ricky Stuart, in all the sartorial glory of correct afternoon garb, sighed heavily as he turned his eyes from the green and tender glory of the little park behind its iron fence. It was a gorgeous, glamorous afternoon. An afternoon when a man would like to be taking his best beloved to a matinée where he might hold her hand in the darkness. An afternoon when a man would like to be motoring through a country just trembling into exquisite, new life—with the best beloved beside him. An afternoon, in short, for romance, adventure, and light-hearted philandering.

Ricky Stuart was going to spend this glorious spring afternoon making his weekly duty call on Aunt Melissa!

Therefore he sighed as he climbed the immaculate steps of the old-fashioned house that faced Gramercy Park, and attacked the bell. There was no

At the given signal Anne faced the camera and took a step forward

hope that Aunt Melissa would not be in—she *would* be, of course, and waiting for him. Great would be her rage if he failed to make this weekly call. Aunt Melissa was sixty-five, and worth millions, and Ricky was her heir. In that one sentence you have the explanation of Ricky's unwilling call at that great gloomy old house.

"Afternoon, Perkins!" he greeted the aged butler who swung the door open for him. "Beautiful day!"

"Yes, sir!" Perkins admitted it reluctantly. "Not much warmth in this pale spring sunshine, though!"

Perkins was a confirmed pessimist. But then, the most confirmed optimist would not have lasted thirty years beneath the same roof with Aunt Melissa as Perkins had done.

Ricky went on into the stately, gloomy old mid-Victorian drawing-room. Presently, Aunt Melissa would rustle stiffly in, give him weak tea, which he loathed, and delicious hot, buttery scones and little thin sugary cakes, which he adored. That was the one bright spot in the tedious call.

Suddenly, as he sat bolt upright in one of the devilishly uncomfortable horsehair chairs with which the drawing-room was crowded, a sound smote his ears. A sound that was muffled but unmistakably miserable, unhappy.

The sound of some one weeping piteously. It came from the direction of the mulberry rep curtains that hung above a deeply recessed window at the left.

Ricky sprang up, crossed to the window and drew back the curtain.

Huddled up on the window sill, her back turned to the narrow, dreary, neglected strip of garden visible from that window, lay a girl, sodden with weeping.

As Ricky drew back the curtain, she lifted her head a little and looked at him, her dark eyes swollen with her tears, her thin, tear-stained face visible through the tangle of dark, dishevelled hair about her face.

"Well—er—what on earth's the matter?" demanded Ricky, in complete amazement.

"Nothing!" snapped the girl, sullenly. "Only—I—I—wish I was—*dead!*"

"Then I'd say plenty's the matter!" said Ricky companionably, welcoming this diversion. He sat himself down beside her on the window sill. "Come on, now—be a nice child and tell daddy all about it!"

At the word "daddy" the girl dissolved once more into tears.

"I—I—wish I *could* tell daddy all about it—but daddy's dead! And I wish I was, too!" she wailed, desolately.

Her too-thin young body was racked with a paroxysm of weeping. She had cried until her eyes were red and swollen and her cheeks were streaked and scarlet with her grief. Her thick black hair, straight and lusterless, was dishevelled and hung damply about her thin little face, and her childish flat little body was clad unbecomingly in a cheap black dress. Thick black stockings and low-heeled, "sensible" black slippers were on her feet. Altogether, she was a most unprepossessing young thing, an immature fifteen or sixteen years. A most unhappy little thing.

RICKY'S pity was aroused, of course, but his curiosity was alert. What was this child doing here? Who was she? He'd never seen her before, and he'd been making his regular ceremonious weekly calls ever since he had left college, three years before.

Wondering, he put his question frankly.

"Who are you, anyway? I'm Richard Stuart, Miss Melissa's nephew."

"I know who you are! I've been seeing you around here for weeks," said the girl impatiently. "I'm Anne Evans. My father was an old friend of Miss Melissa's. When he died, he sent me to her—and she has taken me in—as her favorite football!"

There was a touch of unexpected fire in the last words. Ricky looked at her with a little grin.

"Favorite football?" He pretended to be puzzled.

"To kick when things go wrong!" explained the girl, bitterly. "She doesn't dare fight with the servants, for they can leave and find work somewhere else. But she knows I am absolutely at her mercy, for I've no business training, not a penny, and no way to make any money! I *have* to stay, whether I want to or not. This morning she—she—threw the jam-pot at me—at the breakfast table!"

Down went the black head, and sobs once more shook the thin little body.

"That sounds quite like Aunt Melissa!" admitted Ricky grimly. "Just exactly the sort of thing she *would* do!"

The girl lifted her tear-drenched face.

"Mr. Stuart, you've got lots of friends and you must have a good deal

of influence—won't you help me to get a job? On the stage?" she pleaded unexpectedly.

If she had said "Won't you help me get married to the Prince of Wales?" Ricky couldn't have been more thunderstruck.

This homely, red-eyed, thin little girl wanting to go on the stage! Ricky could have shouted with mirth at the very idea—if he hadn't been so sorry for the poor, homely, miserable little thing.

All humor left him as he looked at her thin, pleading face, the reddened, swollen eyes.

"On the stage?" he repeated, fighting for time. "Good Heavens, child, what do *you* know about the stage?"

"I don't know anything, but I can learn! My mother was an actress—and anyway, I've just *got* to get away from here. I'll simply *die* if I don't!" Her two small, hard little hands with their pitiful, broken, blackened nails clung to his arm, her homely, tear-streaked little face lifted to his. "Please—Mr. Stuart, if you ever did a kind thing in your life—do this for me!"

A footfall in the corridor, clicking crisply on the polished floor—coming closer. The girl sprang up, going white with fear.

Ricky spoke to her swiftly.

"Call me on the telephone to-morrow morning—here's the number—and I'll see what I can do," he promised rashly. "Scamper now, before Aunt Melissa catches you here!"

The girl struggled for coherent speech to answer him.

Suddenly, words being impossible, she caught his hand to her lips, and he felt her tears warm upon it. The next moment, she was gone.

Aunt Melissa swept into the room to see her nephew thrust his hand swiftly, almost guiltily behind him.

THAT night, in his luxurious bachelor quarters, Ricky found himself no nearer to a solution of the problem of Anne Evans.

Glancing idly through his mail, he found a notice of taxes due on a piece of his property up in Westchester County. He smiled a little, reminiscently. That was the Playhouse—a small white cottage, many-windowed, charming—in which his father and mother had spent their honeymoon. Ricky's mother had loved the cottage, and Ricky had spent some happy vacations there. Because his mother loved it, he had kept it. He hadn't seen the Playhouse in several years, although there was a caretaker there to keep it in perpetual order.

For a little while after he wrote a check for the taxes he didn't think of Anne Evans in connection with the Playhouse. And then, with all the suddenness of an inspiration, it came to him.

The Playhouse, lonely and untenanted—in perfect repair, needing only a tenant. Anne Evans, lonely and homeless, dependent on Aunt Melissa's tender mercies! Well—why not?

The poor homely little kid wanted to go on the stage. Absurd, of course. But she could go and live in the Playhouse and she could study something that would fit her to make her own living—and she need no longer be Aunt Melissa's favorite football! The money it would cost to provide lessons and living expenses for her he would never miss.

Anne Evans enlisted his sympathies just as a sick, starved pup would have done; there was no sentiment in his plans for her.

The following morning Anne telephoned him, breathlessly. He suggested that she have lunch with him, and prudently named an Italian *table d'hôte* on Forty-Sixth Street where none of his cronies would see him and ask questions. Over the minestrone he outlined his plans for her, and she listened, her eyes wide with delight.

"And I can study for the stage—take lessons in dramatic art!" she planned. Ricky, with a secret grin, gave in. After all, why not? The poor kid had never had much fun, why not let her indulge herself? He'd see that she had the teachers and the opportunity.

"And when I'm a great star, and world-famous, I can repay you for all the money that you have spent on me!" she promised him largely.

Gravely Ricky assented.

THUS it was that Anne Evans came to live in the Playhouse and be looked after by Mrs. Judkins, a stout, comfortable, motherly widow who was delighted to have some one to mother. The little white cottage was freshened with crisp new cretonne curtains and white paint; with new cushions for the wicker furniture; with green-painted porch-boxes running over with the vari-colored glory of petunias. There were new clothes for Anne. An allowance arrived with the regularity of clock-work at the bank in the near-by small town on the first of every month. There were teachers for Anne, lessons she pored over with almost religious fervor.

For a month or so, Ricky's visits were steady. Then some one invited him to join a yachting party that sounded rather amusing and off he went. There were two or three letters mailed from foreign ports and after that—silence. Ricky's lawyers attended to the allowance which continued to arrive, and Anne continued to study. Having known Ricky so casually, despite her deep and fervent gratitude, Anne scarcely missed him.

Time passed—smoothly. A year. Anne grew up. From a too-thin, awkward, all-knees-and-elbows young thing of sixteen, Anne, at eighteen, bloomed like a newly-opened rosebud. And Ricky had completely forgotten all about her.

IT was a glorious day in early June. The country club lawn was like a fresh green velvet rug, and the long, low, rambling structure that was the clubhouse glistened whitely, its black and scarlet awnings in vivid contrast to fresh white paint.

The Dog Show was in full swing. Women in dainty, filmy frocks, men in flannels, or golf-things wandered about. Cameramen were busy getting "shots" at this celebrity and that, and filming the various prize-winning entries.

A girl of medium height, carrying herself with an easy, natural grace, crossed the line of vision of one of the cameramen. Her yellow chiffon frock and wide-brimmed black horsehair hat would screen beautifully, he thought. Without waiting to find out who she might be, the cameraman sprang forward.

"Beg pardon, lady—we'd like to get a shot of these two Irish wolfhounds and I wondered if you'd mind holding their leashes while we snap 'em," he begged. "And if you'd just say a few words—the names of the dogs, and their prize-winning records. This is a sound news weekly, you know!"

The girl smiled and the cameraman's eyes lighted with appreciation. Zowie, what a peach!

"Of course I'd be glad to!" she assured him.

The sound-camera and its attendant apparatus on the lumbering truck were wheeled into position. The cameraman turned once more to the girl—who was, of course, Anne Evans.

"When I signal 'ready' you start along the terrace here, leading the dogs, and down the steps—I'll put up my hand to show you where to stop. Then, in your natural voice, just tell us the names of the dogs, their owner, the fact that they are champions and very rare in this country, and the name of the club. Doesn't matter what you say as long as the audience can hear your voice, see?" he told her briskly.

Anne laughed and agreed.

The other cameramen, sighting the little scene, came over and set up their machines. Several of the newspaper still photographers followed suit. By the time Anne was ready to do her bit, she had a fair-sized audience, but it was all so matter of fact, so casual, that she had no thought of being nervous.

At the given signal she came across the terrace with her smooth, graceful, flowing walk that was a joy to behold. Down the steps, the two handsome dogs pacing along just before her, stately, dignified, as though they appreciated and understood this honor that was being bestowed upon their magnificent selves. There Anne paused, lifted her head, smiled, and spoke clearly and simply into the instrument before her.

Anne Evans could not know what a tremendous effect this casual happening was to have on her future.

THE following afternoon three men sat together in the projection room of a motion picture studio in New York. On the screen before them appeared the image of a long, low, rambling white structure and a sloping velvety lawn. Along the terrace and down the steps came a girl, not very tall, beautifully made, her vivid face shaded by a wide-brimmed transparent black hat, her filmy frock photographing a clear, lovely soft white. She led two beautiful Irish wolfhounds, and as she came close enough to the camera, she smiled—and spoke.

At the first word, the first clear, yet soft tone of her voice, the short, thick-necked, bald-headed man leaned sharply forward, tense, listening. When the lights flared up, one of the motion picture industry's most important executives turned to the "talent-scout" beside him.

"Who is she?" he demanded briefly.

"I haven't found out yet. I wanted you to see this shot first!"

"Then find her. Sign her for a year, with an option of three more to follow!" said the executive, firmly. "With a voice like that, and a little training, she'll be worth a fortune to us. Beautiful faces, handsome bodies, trained actresses I stumble over wherever I go, but a perfect 'mike' voice like that—we gotta have it, that's all! Get her!"

ANNE EVANS answered a ring at the door of the Playhouse. A nattily-dressed, pleasant-faced young man stood there, smiling at her eagerly.

"Miss Anne Evans?" he inquired politely. "You posed for a news-reel shot a day or so ago, holding two Irish wolfhounds?"

"Yes!" Anne admitted, puzzled.

"My company is interested in you, Miss Evans. Ever considered going into the movies?" asked the young man, taking heart from the fact that this girl lived in a modest little cottage and

was, obviously, no haughty society beauty.

"No, I'm studying for the stage! I hope to make my first appearance this autumn," answered Anne, surprised and bewildered. "You surely don't mean that your company was sufficiently interested to send you up here to see me?"

"That bit in the news weekly, Miss Evans, proves that you have something very rare and precious—a perfect 'mike-voice.' A voice that the microphone welcomes and makes the most of! If you are interested, come into town and talk the matter over with my company. I'm quite sure they will make it worth your while to sign a contract for a year. With an option for three more if you are as successful with the first year's work as we feel sure you will be."

In the end, a little dazed and bewildered by the unexpectedness of it all, Anne signed the contract prepared for her in the executive office.

The Playhouse was closed, dismantled. Anne turned away from it with tears in her eyes, but with the knowledge that she was entering upon that destiny for which Ricky Stuart's faith had prepared her.

She hadn't heard from Ricky in more than a year. She knew only that Miss Melissa was dead and that she had left her entire fortune unconditionally to Ricky.

AND thus it was that Anne Evans stepped from the quiet and the humdrum of life at the Playhouse into the clamor, the confusion, the breathlessness of life in the Magic World of Make-Believe that is a modern motion picture studio.

She was greeted with a fanfare of publicity, Supreme Films' answer to the public's cry for new faces, new personalities on the screen. She was not to be known as Anne Evans any longer. From now on she was to be Sanna Laurelle, a name the publicity department considered far more suitable for a famous star.

During the first bewildered days of her new life, Anne had the feeling that she was living in the midst of a nightmare from which she must surely awaken to find herself once more in the cool little white and chintz room of the Playhouse. As she stood for long, patient hours while the studio designers draped gorgeous glittering fabrics about her slim body and wove them into gowns that would make women sigh with envy; as she posed for photographs in every conceivable costume and manner; as she presided over "press-teas" and luncheons and banquets; as she was photographed with this and that visiting celebrity; as she went through the whole pageant that is part of becoming a star, she wondered if she would not have been far happier back in the Playhouse.

It was only when she was tired, of course, that she thought of that. Most of the time she was too excited, too breathless to think at all.

Now and then she wondered about Ricky Stuart, wished that she might see him, tell him of all the things that had befallen her. From the very first week's pay check, a sizable amount went into the savings bank toward repaying Ricky for her chance at life.

That she would meet Ricky again some time, somewhere, she was serenely sure. There had been no time in her life for love. Ricky was almost literally the only young and personable man she had ever met. Coupled with this was the fact that Ricky had held out a helping hand and had lifted her from

the depths of loneliness and young misery to the heights of delight.

In her heart and in her thoughts, Ricky was Prince Charming!

She little dreamed in what wise Ricky would come back to her.

One morning in the midst of her first production for Supreme Films, she discovered the studio in a turmoil. As she reached her own set Anne looked around her with bewilderment.

"How come?" she asked the assistant cameraman, indicating the hurrying to and fro of publicity people, technical folk, a stray lesser executive or two.

The assistant cameraman was redheaded and Irish, and romantically in love with the lovely Sanna Laurelle. He grinned.

The one and only Valerie is arriving this morning, and the whole place is tying itself in knots to be sure that nothing has been done that she wouldn't want done, nothing left undone that she would want done—trying to stave off the usual fireworks and hysterics!" he informed her lucidly.

Anne stared at him, more bewildered than ever.

"Valerie? Who is she—a new star?" she asked, frankly.

The cameraman's eyebrows shot upward as he gave a hastily stifled shout of laughter.

"Ye gods, Miss Laurelle, you don't mean that you've never heard of Valerie, Supreme's most famous star? Sufferin' sassafrass—if only I dared tell Valerie that! She thinks there isn't a man, woman or child in the entire universe and parts of Mars who doesn't idolize ner!" he gasped.

"I'm sorry. I suppose I should know all about her, but I lived in the country and I haven't seen a great many movies," Anne apologized, with dancing eyes. "Tell me about her, Jimmy!"

Jimmy cast a swift glance toward the set. His experienced eye told him that it would be at least half an hour before they were needed, and he launched into a pungent description of Valerie.

"She's a Russian, or a Pole, or something, and she strews husbands along her path as some women strew discarded hats! She's been in Paris shedding her fourth or fifth. Anyway, she's the sort of woman that other women look at and say, 'I *can't* see what men see in her!' But men look at her and sigh, and say, 'Please marry me, or I'll shoot myself!'" he explained, with a relish. "Blond, and fragile, and helpless-looking—wears clothes like nobody's business and is threatened with a disease of the arms because she wears so many diamond and emerald bracelets!

"To the outer world, she is honey and roses and cream—sweet, and placid and lovely—but to those of us here in the studio, she's a hellcat if ever there was one! Lady, you ain't never seen temperament until you see Valerie in one of her mad rages! The most peaceful three months that Supreme Arts has ever known began the day Valerie sailed—and ended this morning!"

"Phew!" said Anne, with frank enjoyment of his pungent description. "She sounds, Jimmy, like an interesting woman. I can't wait to see her."

Jimmy's grin was sardonic, but there was pity in his eyes.

"Oh, don't worry—you'll get acquainted and *how!*" he told her, cryptically.

IT was nearly noon when a little ripple of whispers, murmurs, and excitement ran through the studio like fire at the roots of prairie grass.

Anne, resting in the little canvas

Anne gasped. There, in the flesh, stood Ricky!

chair that had her name painted across the back, was watching with keen interest a scene between Donald Rodgers, her leading man, and the character woman, when she became conscious of a little group of people coming across the studio.

A woman was in the lead, a woman in the smartest of Parisian ensembles, her arms laden with roses, an extravagant cluster of orchids fastened against her shoulder. Surrounding her were half a dozen executives of Supreme Films, a little group of publicity people, and studio hangers-on. The woman in the lead moved with the conscious grace of a queen attended by her slaves.

Obviously, the famous Valerie had arrived.

Hopkins, Anne's director, sensing the approach of the star, called "cut" and turned to speak to Valerie. Others on the set came over to greet her. She was a queen holding court.

But suddenly her blue eyes fell upon Anne who was still sitting quietly in

her little canvas chair, and as Anne's tranquil eyes met the famous deep blue ones, Valerie drew herself up haughtily. One read her thought—ah, a peasant who dared remain seated in the presence of the queen? A vassal who refused homage?

"And who is this?" she asked crisply, indicating Anne with one fragile hand weighted with a diamond of such size and brilliance that it seemed incredible.

"I don't think you've met Miss Laurelle—our new star! Miss Laurelle, may I present Valerie?" said Hopkins, and Anne stood up, smiling, perfectly at ease.

"How do you do?" she said pleasantly.

Valerie's eyes sped swiftly over the other girl, drinking in her youth, her fresh beauty. Suddenly, by comparison, Valerie looked older, not quite fresh, a little dulled. Clever girl that she was, she realized it—and the iron of hatred entered her soul. To come back, triumphant after her three months' vacation abroad, to find a younger and more beautiful star in the studio! Her eyes flashed, and she drew herself up. By the merest nod, she acknowledged Anne's greeting.

But Anne wasn't looking at Valerie. Instead, her gaze was directed across Valerie's beautifully-clad shoulders to a handsome, sun-bronzed young man who was in Valerie's train.

Anne's eyes widened, and her breath caught in her throat. With a little eager gasp, she took a swift involuntary step toward that young man.

For there in the train of the famous Valerie was Ricky Stuart!

"Ricky!" she whispered joyously.

He glanced at her with interest and nothing else. No hint of recognition —no eager light of welcome.

He had not even caught that glad, welcoming light in Anne's eyes! But Valerie had, and her own blue eyes had hardened and shot sparks of fury. Anne's heart sank plummetwise in her breast, and she completely ignored Valerie's rage as the little procession passed on toward the star's dressing-room.

THROUGHOUT the long day Anne puzzled over Ricky's failure to recognize her. Had she, then, changed so much, Or had it been merely that the thick yellowish make-up required by the argus-eyed camera had confused him? Or—and this was nearest the truth—had she been so slight an incident in the life of Ricky Stuart that the moment he had ceased to see her she had ceased to exist for him?

That thought hurt. For more than two years the image had reigned in her heart—her Prince Charming! Her White Knight, without fear and without reproach! She had dreamed, during the long, tranquil, peaceful days at the Playhouse, of Ricky's return. She had worked hard—studied hard—cared for her hair and her skin, and exercised for the good of her figure—making herself beautiful so that when Ricky returned he would find her lovely.

And now—Ricky had returned. With eyes that could not see below the make-up, or recognize the girl whom he had befriended and who had repaid him by giving him her young, untried, eager heart!

In her dressing-room at the end of the day, Anne removed the make-up, and when her features were clear of the thick grease-paint and mascaro, she leaned closer to the mirror, studying her face—trying to see why Ricky had failed to recognize her. He had gone away and left a leggy, awkward, too-

thin girl with straight, lusterless black hair, wide, eager eyes, a thin little face with high cheek bones.

Facing her now in the mirror, Anne saw black hair, shining with health and care, rippling in soft waves to a loose knot low on her neck; saw a face that had filled out to the perfect contours of beauty; saw a skin clear, camellia-white except for a fleck of healthy color on the cheeks and a warm, scarlet mouth; saw eyes that were still youthfully wide and eager. The shoulders revealed by the dull blue kimona were no longer too thin, but creamily perfect, smooth, rounded, with delicious dimples.

Suddenly, Anne looked up with a start and saw that she was no longer alone in the dressing-room. Back of her stood Valerie, who had entered with catlike tread and without knocking. Valerie made no effort to conceal her enmity, her ugliness of disposition.

"So? You spend hours admiring yourself, eh? It will do you no good!" she snapped viciously. "You are a fool to think that you can stay here, now that I am back!"

Anne stood up, drawing her kimona about her.

"I did not hear you knock before you came in!" she said, very gently.

Valerie's eyes flashed, the cool reprimand flicking her in the face.

"And why should I knock? I am Valerie—I am at home anywhere in this studio!" she snapped.

"I'm afraid you are mistaken about that. This is my own dressing-room—I prefer that you knock before you come in!" said Anne still quietly.

Valerie gasped with rage, and took a step closer to Anne.

"Is it that you are unable to get men of your own, and you think you will take one of Valerie's?" she demanded.

Anne flushed a little, but her head lifted.

"I don't know what you are talking about!" she said clearly.

Valerie laughed—an insulting little laugh.

"That," she stated calmly, "is a lie! You know perfectly well! This afternoon—I saw you when you tried to attract the attention of Mr. Stuart!"

"I knew Mr. Stuart some years ago," said Anne, forcing herself to speak evenly, although she was trembling with anger and shame at this ugly scene that had been forced upon her.

"Oh—so?" Valerie's smile was insolent. "That, too, I think, is a lie—else your memory is better than his. He did not recognize you—he has eyes only for Valerie! Perhaps you did not know that we are to be married soon?"

Anne caught her breath on a little stricken sob. Ricky! The Prince Charming of her dreams—married to this girl! Oh, no, no—it couldn't be! Surely not! Yet—would Valerie have announced it so calmly had it not been true? Before she could control the words in her heart, they were spoken—

"You—you love him?"

VALERIE laughed, knowing that the girl before her was suffering and relishing the thought. For her jealousy of this girl's youth and beauty made her cruel.

"Love? Bah!" she scoffed. "I will marry him because he has a great deal of money—millions. It will be nice to have millions to play with! But love?"

Her shrewd blue eyes swept over the girl before her; then, with a little rustle of her expensive garments, she turned toward the door.

"And now that I have warned you—" she began.

But Anne spoke swiftly, impetuously.

"Your warning is of no consequence! Mr. Stuart once did me a very great favor. Whether he remembers me or not, I count him as one of my best friends. I certainly shall not stand by and see him married out of hand merely because he is rich!"

Valerie laughed outright.

"Oh—so? And may I ask what you intend to do to stop my marrying him?" she drawled.

"If necessary, I will go to him and tell him just what you have told me—that you are marrying him for his money!" cried Anne passionately.

Valerie flung back her head and laughed with genuine amusement.

"Do! Nothing in the world would harmonize more perfectly with my plans! The more you attack me to him the more eagerly will he defend me. I shall marry him!" she cried, and before Anne could muster words with which to answer had swung open the door and was out of the room.

Anne stood quite still, rigid, facing that closed door, her stunned brain taking in to the full all Valerie's revelations. Valerie was going to marry Ricky, the man she had loved with all her clean, ardent young heart for more than two years. To lose him like this! Oh, but it was bitter! To have lost him to a girl worthy of him—that would not have mattered so much. It would have hurt of course, but not like this.

After a long moment she turned back to her dressing table. Her fingers trembled, her eyes were blurred with tears. It seemed a cruel thing that her eager dreams of these last two years should have been smashed to bits like this. Just when she felt that they might begin to come true. Valerie—and Ricky! It was a terrible thing—but Valerie had been right. What could she, Anne, do to prevent it? To go to Ricky would only be to fling him at Valerie the more surely. No, that wouldn't do!

But there *must* be a way!

As she left the studio in the long golden twilight of that summer's day Anne knew she would find that way! She would save Ricky from Valerie.

FOR the next week things moved smoothly enough at the studio. The "rushes" on Anne's picture were most gratifying, justifying the executives who had signed this beautiful girl with the perfect "mike voice," that rarest and most precious of discoveries in this day of the talking movie.

But there was an undercurrent of tension about the sets on which Valerie's production was beginning. Now and then, going to or from her own soundproofed sets, Anne heard echoes of the tempest. Occasionally she caught glimpses of Ricky and knew that he was very attentive to Valeria, but there was never a chance to talk to him.

And then the storm broke!

Hushed, wide-eyed, the entire studio gathered in little groups to whisper, only to separate swiftly and guiltily as some one from the front office, eyes straight ahead, mouth grimly set, hurried by.

Valerie's voice did not "register." Valerie was "being let out!" In the classic phrase of the studio, Valerie was "all washed up" with Supreme Films!

The woman whom the publicity department had caused to be hailed as "the screen's most glamorous personality," "the best dressed woman in the world," was found to have a voice that the merciless microphone caught as flat, uninteresting—impossible. And

since Supreme Films had stated that they would make no more silent pictures Valerie was "out." She had a contract for another year, but despite her protest, Supreme Films had bought up this contract, paying her a large sum of money to release them.

The whole studio breathed a guilty sigh of relief. Valerie had been a most expensive star. Her temperament had cost the studio thousands of dollars in spoiled scenes, hours of being held up while she raved.

Now, faced by the ignominy of being "fired" as heartlessly and as coldly as any little "extra" girl who had not lived up to the casting director's expectations, Valerie staged an outburst of temperament and fury that became a classic in studio annals. Anne, released from work at five o'clock, could not leave the studio quickly enough. The very air seemed blue and stifling with Valerie's outburst of senseless, futile rage.

AS Anne emerged from the studio building she saw a man sitting in a smart coupé, parked at the curb. Ricky, of course, waiting for Valerie. Under an impulse that she did not stop to anaylze, Anne went swiftly toward him.

"Ricky!" she cried softly, smiling, her eyes a little bright, one ungloved hand held out to him.

He stood up. Then her hand was in his and he was looking down at her, puzzled, admiring—but without recognizing her.

"Er—how do you do?" he stammered uncomfortably, patently trying very hard to remember just who she was.

"Don't you remember me?" she asked, a little hurt.

"Remember you? There's some mistake, I'm sure. I've never met you. I'm quite positive about that, for if I'd ever met you I'm quite sure I could never have forgotten you!" said Ricky promptly.

For a moment the words, "Why, I'm Anne Evans—don't you remember —Aunt Melissa's favorite football?" trembled on Anne's lips. Had she spoken them the whole course of events might have been changed. But at that precise moment Valerie's ugly, middle-aged French maid, Celeste, appeared, her pale eyes darting suspiciously from Anne to Ricky.

"Pardon, m'sieur—Mam'zelle Valerie—she ask that you forgive her—she will be detain' quite late—she ask' that m'sieu do not wait for her!" said Celeste.

"Oh, I'm sorry! Please tell mam'zelle I will call her later in the evening then, Celeste," said Ricky.

When Celeste had gone Ricky turned back to Anne, his interest piqued by his curiosity.

"It's obvious that you are leaving the studio for the day. Won't you let me drive you home while you tell me who you are?" he begged, and Anne saw that it was his curiosity as much as his admiration that dictated the invitation.

An idea came to her and she determined to follow it. As long as she could keep Ricky wondering about her, just so long she could be sure of keeping him interested. Once he remembered her, well, perhaps he would think of her merely as a youngster to whom he had given a chance at life. His feeling would be friendly, but it would be swallowed up in his passion for Valerie, and he would once more forget Anne. If only she could force herself into the front of his thoughts, keep herself there for awhile—

mightn't she have a chance to make him forget Valerie?

"I'm waiting!" said Ricky gently, his interested eyes on her vivid young face. "Are you going to let me drive you home?"

She laughed up at him.

"We-e-ell—I think I am!" she told him. "And—since Valerie won't be able to dine with you—well, it just happens that *I* have the evening free, too!"

She was so gay, so light-hearted about it, that Ricky responded promptly. What if he hadn't met her? What if it *was* unconventional? He had only to look into the pretty dark eyes lifted so confidently to his to know that she was not the girl to do unconventional things as a rule. If he was puzzled by her manner, he was not suspicious.

"Then shall it be dinner—a show—a drive?" he suggested eagerly as he settled himself beside her in the car and meshed the gears.

"Dinner and a short drive, but not a show. I'm working to-morrow, which means I must be at home by ten—not later!" said Anne firmly. "And if I am to choose the place for dinner—" she smiled at him, a trifle breathlessly, her eyes eager, as she named an Italian *table d'hôte* on Forty-Sixth Street.

The place where she and Ricky had had lunch on a long ago day when she had been Aunt Melissa's favorite football and when Ricky had told her of his plan that she should live in the Playhouse and study dramatic art. Would he remember? Would he recognize her now? She waited, almost holding her breath—and then her heart sank a little as Ricky glanced down at her, curiously.

"My word, you like quaint dining places, don't you? I thought all movie stars scorned anything less than the Ritz or Pierre's!" he told her.

Anne turned her face away for a moment while she mastered her disappointment.

"Oh, but I haven't always been a movie star!" she answered in a voice that tried to be casual. "And long ago I used to love that place. Going there to dinner to-night will be a sentimental journey."

RICKY'S interested glance grew more intense. Lord, what a little beauty she was! Sanna Laurelle, the newest screen sensation, who was a star even before her first picture had been revealed to the public! He was always running across photographs of her, in magazines, in rotogravure sections, on the covers of motion picture magazines. And yet she had accepted a dinner invitation—in fact, had shamelessly angled for it—with a man she did not even know, had never met.

"I am honored indeed to have been chosen as the escort for a sentimental journey," he told her as he drove down town. "Why did you speak to me just now as though we had met before?"

Anne surveyed him with an enigmatic expression in her dark eyes.

"Because," she dared finally, "we *have* met before! Even though you don't remember me!"

Ricky stared at her with narrowed eyes, while a traffic cop swore savagely as he all but grazed a speeding taxi in his absorption. He righted the coupé and drove on, his brow twisted in a little puzzled frown.

"But, my dear girl, that's ridiculous! For if I had met you I'd have remembered you. You're—I don't like to seem crude—but, honestly, you're the most beautiful girl I ever saw. I *couldn't* have forgotten you!"

Anne drank in the words thirstily. Oh, then he *did* think her beautiful! Perhaps, even yet, she could win him from Valerie. She was all primitive woman now, fighting with whatever weapon came to her hand—fighting for the man she adored—fighting to save him from the talons of a girl who wanted only his money.

"Tell me, Ricky—*am* I beautiful?" she whispered shamelessly.

Ricky laughed shortly, a little repelled by the question. It seemed to him that she was angling without mercy.

"Of course you know that you are utterly beautiful!" he told her dispassionately.

"More beautiful than Valerie?" dared Anne.

She saw Ricky's expression alter, his jaw set a little. And her heart sank even before he said, rather grimly:

"Let's leave her name out of it, shall we?"

Anne sat back, feeling as though he had slapped her. That meant, she told her sinking heart, that he was in love with Valerie. Then—perhaps she couldn't save him, after all. He didn't want to be saved!

THE drive was finished in silence. As they walked toward the restaurant Ricky began to talk, telling her some amusing story of an experience abroad, and Anne exerted herself to be an interested listener.

They dined, and afterward Ricky drove her home, without once resuming the personal note. As he left her at the door of the apartment house where she lived he asked politely:

"Am I to see you again—soon?"

Anne lowered her head so that he should not see the tears in her eyes. Oh, it was not this way that she had planned their evening! She hadn't wanted it to end like this! But there was nothing she could say. So she tried to be gallant, cheerful.

"Oh—perhaps! Who knows? It's been a delightful evening! Good night!" and she went swiftly into the apartment house, leaving him standing there on the sidewalk, looking after her, a little puzzled, frowning, not entirely pleased.

SHE saw no more of him for several days. Nor did she see or hear of Valerie until one morning when her breakfast tray was brought in to her by the little colored maid. Resting on top of her morning mail was a newspaper that had been mailed to her. Puzzled, she tore off the wrapper. There was a heavy black pencil mark drawn about a column devoted to news and gossip of the studios. The item grinned up at her:

FAMOUS STAR TO HAVE HER OWN COMPANY

Gossip has been rife about the fate of Valerie, the glamorous star, late of Supreme Films, for they do say as how Valerie and Supreme Films have parted once and for all. But don't be alarmed, you Valerie fans, for she is to do bigger and better pictures—and under the banner of her own company.

The morning papers will carry official stories of the new company, the financial backing of which is guaranteed by Mr. Richard Allen Stuart, young millionaire, *fiancé* of the glamorous Valerie. Your scribe had the news hot over the telephone an hour ago from Valerie herself. The first production of the new company will be made in New York; subsequent productions on the West Coast. An amusing feature of the announcement is that Mr. Stuart has leased studio space from Supreme Films for the production of the first picture, so Valerie won't have to pack her famous French gowns or her make-up! We understand that Valerie will have com-

plete authority in the choice of stories, writers, production, and director. Good luck, Valerie!

The paper dropped from Anne's nerveless hands, and she lay for a long moment quite still among her pillows, her neglected breakfast cooling on the tray before her.

So Valerie had won! She was announcing her engagement to Ricky in that little paragraph—and she was also flinging her defiance into the face of Supreme Films. Arrogant in her conceit, she believed herself still a great star, despite the handicap of her voice.

Anne knew that had there been a chance of "putting her over," Supreme Films would never have let Valerie go; yet Valerie had persuaded Ricky to back her in a company of her own! More, she had leased space from Supreme Films, so that she could work there, defiant, in the face of the very company that let her go! It was a gesture that would prove extremely costly to Ricky.

With a heavy heart Anne dressed and departed for the studio. She found the place a buzz of comment, as she had expected. The frankly expressed opinion of the people about her was that Ricky Stuart was a sap—a typical

Ricky, still holding her hand, looked deeply into her eyes, unconscious of the fury behind him

"butter and egg" man who had allowed himself to be mulcted by the merciless Valerie.

Timidly, she asked Hopkins a question.

"Through? Sure, Valerie's through! The man who's backing her is going to get some of the most expensive experience of his life. It would be a lot better for him if he went down to the docks and tossed his money into the river—he'd have just as good a chance to get it back! Valerie can't speak lines. And now that they've given her full authority—well, it's going to be fun to watch! But I'm sorry for the sap who signs the checks," said Hopkins firmly.

BEFORE the week was out Hopkins's prediction was proved true. Valerie, forced to yield somewhat to Supreme Films, had been temperamental and hard to handle; but Valerie, as the head of her own company, proved to be a complete study in unruliness.

She chose a director who was wise enough to ask a huge salary and then allow her to direct herself; a script writer who was equally as wise, and who wrote a story that consisted almost exclusively of close-ups of Valerie; and a supporting cast who did little but form a background for the star. The leading man was frankly "ham." Money was spent like water. No one cared about saving it; every one was concerned only with lining his own pockets at the expense of a bewildered, helpless-looking Ricky Stuart.

Valerie's temperament knew no bounds. She raged about the set, she held up for hours scenes involving a hundred or more "extra people" drawing from seven fifty to twenty-five dollars a day. She grew more and more unmanageable with every day that passed, and Ricky grew a little more haggard.

When Valerie discovered that Anne's first picture was to be given a Broadway showing, with a first night that would compare favorably with the first nights of new stage plays, she became obsessed with a desire to have her own picture ready for showing within the same week. At an exorbitant rate, a theater was engaged in the same block.

Anne's picture was finished and sent to the cutting room. The moment she learned this, Valerie flung her company into a mad rush, working eighteen hours a day until, a few days later, the final scenes were finished and her picture, too, went to the cutting room.

Anne's picture, *Star Dust and Dreams*, was slated for a Wednesday night opening. A representative first night audience was guaranteed by the fact that there was no other play opening that night; too, Supreme Film's publicity department had outdone themselves on advance publicity. The industry and the public at large were extremely curious to see this girl who was so good that she was put into a starring rôle for her first screen appearance.

Anne, in a lemon moire period gown, the long, close-fitting bodice sleeveless and quite low in the back, the skirt very full, slightly wired at the hips and dipping quite long in the back, occupied a stage box, her arms laden with the inevitable roses. She was trembling with excitement, her hands icy cold. The house was packed. Practically every one downstairs was in evening dress, and there were shoulder corsages of orchids and the flash of jewels all over the house. A thoroughly auspicious beginning for Anne's new career.

Just before the house lights dark-

ened for the beginning of the performance Valerie, in black chiffon and pearls, very regal and lovely and ethereal, floated into the opposite box, followed by Ricky and half a dozen other men. They made a great deal of noise as they settled themselves, and the eyes of the entire audience were upon them before they were comfortable. Valerie flung Anne a glance of triumph.

Then the lights went down, the screen was revealed and *Star Dust and Dreams* began its first official showing.

IT was a story of young, idealistic love and romance—an April-like story of youth and charm—and from the moment that Anne walked across the screen and spoke her first line, the audience liked her. Before the picture was half over, the executives relaxed a little in contentment, knowing that the picture was a success, and their new star accepted by the most critical public she would have to face.

It was an evening of delight and confusion and glamour and magic for Anne. She was a success. She had justified Supreme Films' faith in her, and her feet were set firmly on the rungs of the ladder of success. When the picture was over, one of the first to congratulate her was Valerie—a little pale beneath her expertly applied make-up, her blue eyes cold and venomous, but her voice sweet and limpid—and insincere.

"We're going to be neighbors, Sanna dear, not only in the studio, but on Broadway! My new picture, *Love's Sacrifice,* is opening next door to-morrow night, and I shall expect you there, dear! There will be a box at the ticket office for you!" Valerie assured Anne, being also quite sure that newspaper people standing near heard her words.

"Congratulations, Miss Laurelle!" said Ricky Stuart, his voice too low to reach beyond Anne's ears. "And now more than ever I regret that we did *not* meet long ago, so that I could say 'Sanna Laurelle, the great star? Why, I knew her when she was—'"

"A homely, awkward, miserably unhappy—charity guest!" Anne supplied swiftly, and saw Ricky's forehead draw into a little puzzled frown, as his admiring eyes swept over her—slim, exquisite, perfectly turned out in her lemon moire frock.

"Homely, awkward — you could never have been that, Miss Laurelle!" he protested swiftly.

"All that and more!" Anne insisted firmly. "Perhaps, some day—I may tell you about it, Ricky!"

His eyes warmed a little, and his hand tightened on hers.

"That's a promise—I shall hold you to it!" he told her softly.

AND so Anne's night of triumph passed into history, leaving Anne firmly entrenched in her position as Supreme Films' foremost star, heralded by hardheaded critics as the screen's best bet for the coming season.

The following night was Valerie's.

The theater was beautifully decorated, and filled with practically the same crowd that had filled the theater next door the night before. Men in evening dress, women in filmy, low cut gowns and shoulder corsages of orchids, the gleam of jewels; a costly, overelaborate stage presentation—and at last, the house lights darkening—the screen coming alive.

In her stage box, the cynosure of all eyes, sat Valerie. She wore a French frock of eggshell satin, and her famous emeralds—a king's ransom would not

have paid their cost. Beside her in the box, Ricky, pale, a little strained; the "ham" leading man, strutting with glory, and preening himself before the eyes of the curious audience. Across the theater, in another stage box, Anne, lovely in simple white—tense, strained, watching the screen almost as tensely as she had watched her own work last night. Then she had been concerned—but to-night's picture concerned the man she loved. Practically the whole of Ricky's fortune was tied up in this picture, almost two million dollars. Squandered, wasted?

The opening scene revealed a set that had been constructed at a cost of close to two hundred thousand dollars—a set that was used for nothing more impressive than the introduction of Valerie, in the character of a Spanish flower vender. The set and the undeniable beauty of Valerie brought a little spontaneous burst of applause.

The first really tense, dramatic scene was reached—a scene that had been planned to bring tears to the eyes of the audience. For a moment there was silence, broken only by the voices from the screen—voices that were flat, overdramatic. The scene was badly overplayed. Suddenly, from the back of the crowded theater, there came a little snicker of laughter echoed somewhere else—and then the entire audience was laughing!

Anne trembled with pity for Valerie, whom she could dimly see across the theater. As scene after scene unreeled on the screen before her, carrying on the highly artificial, unreal story—that had been further distorted to give Valerie every possible moment on the screen—the laughter mounted, until at intermission the audience was rocking with that half hysterical mirth that sometimes seizes a crowded house.

Valerie sprang to her feet, leaning over the railing of the box, her face white and distorted beneath her make-up, shrieking her rage aloud at them.

"You fools! You fools! How dare you laugh at me? How dare you laugh at my picture? You are imbeciles—idiots—you do not have the brains to appreciate a real picture!" she shrieked insanely. That brought half the audience to its feet in anger and resentment.

The ham leading man and Ricky caught Valerie and finally managed to drag her, still shrieking and swearing her rage at the audience, out of hearing back stage. There was no thought of resuming the picture. The audience, laughing, murmuring, gossiping about to-night's scene that had once and for all ruined Valerie's hope of returning to public favor, filed slowly out of the theater, drawing wraps about shoulders, pausing to murmur: "My *dear*—can you *imagine?* Such an insane picture? Such a *ridiculous* scene?" And the newspaper and magazine people, eyes alight with unholy glee, were rushing away to their offices to pound out spicy accounts of Valerie's farewell to "her American public."

FROM her seat Anne had an oblique glimpse back stage. She saw Ricky, hands sunk deep in his pockets, standing forlornly alone, while interested groups clustered about, giggling and whispering.

Without stopping to consider, Anne rose and slipped back stage, going straight to Ricky.

"I'm terribly sorry, Ricky!" she said quietly, putting out her hand.

He looked up, giving her a forced smile.

"Thanks; decent of you!" he told her. "I suppose I had it coming to

me, though. I was so—damn wise! I thought I knew it all, that producing movies was a game any man could tackle. Well—I've learned a lot tonight!"

"I'm—sorry!" said Anne again, because there was nothing else that she could say.

Ricky, still holding her hand, looked deeply into her eyes that were misted with tears. Her rose-red mouth that was a little tremulous and was trying hard to smile, April wise, through her tears.

From the depths of his heart, without the faintest attempt to stop the words, Ricky said, as one has made a tremendous discovery:

"What an utter fool I have been! What an infernal mess I have made of my whole future life!"

While Anne stared at him, bewildered, Ricky went on gently:

"I am engaged to her, you know, and so I dare not ask you to let me come to see you—to give me a chance to win your love!"

The knowledge that she was the goal of all his dreams had come to him so suddenly that the thought of dissembling did not occur to him. He had seen her almost every day for three months or more; he had talked to her at the studio; had laughed with her over amusing small happenings in the daily World of Make-Believe; several times, when Valerie had been working late, they had dined together; once or twice they had gone to the theater; and he had thought of her only as a beautiful girl, good company, a good friend. And now—

With the scales dropping suddenly from his eyes, he realized his former blindness. The girl before him had made herself a part of his life. He had been engaged to Valerie before he had become conscious of Sanna Laurelle. And now, when it was too late, he had discovered that Sanna Laurelle was the one girl in the world he wanted who could make him happy.

"You've had my love, Ricky, almost from the very first—oh, years ago!" said Anne gently, so softly that Ricky could not be quite sure that he had really heard her.

Back of them, Valerie's voice, forced to an unnatural self-control, spoke.

"So you, too, have come to gloat over me, Sanna Laurelle?"

"No, Valerie. I have come to say that I am sorry," said Anne quietly.

Valerie's blue eyes flashed frostily.

"Sorry? I do not want your sympathy!" she blazed furiously. "I have made a great picture—I have given to it my heart's blood—the best that is in me! I have worked without sparing myself—and now these people do not see the beauty of it. They laugh! Fools—fools!"

She caught her lip between her teeth until a tiny drop of blood showed. A light of insane anger was in her eyes—but there was something else, too—something inscrutable, something hard to name—an ominous something that turned Anne cold with a sickening sense of fear.

"But I forget! I came to ask my *fiancé* to come to supper with me. And I am glad to find my fellow star, the famous and beautiful Sanna Laurelle here, because I want her to come with us." Valerie's voice was cold with her effort at self-control. "You will come, Miss Laurelle? You will offend me greatly if you do not!"

Anne hesitated. But she had put herself into such a position that she could scarcely refuse without unpleasantness. And so, gracefully, she yielded. The party was made up of Valerie,

Ricky, Anne, the leading man, the director, and several others, all very busy offering reasons for the lamentable failure of *Love's Sacrifice.*

THE door was opened by Valerie's Japanese butler in a white linen house coat, and then Valerie excused herself to see about the serving of supper.

Anne watched her go with a little feeling of uneasiness. She felt out of place here in the home of the girl who hated her so—who was going to marry the man Anne had loved for two years and more. The man who was so ready to love Anne if only he might have the chance. His eyes had told her that an hour ago, and since then her heart had been singing.

Valerie reëntered, carrying two cocktail glasses filled with an amber liquid. The butler carried a tray on which were a dozen more glasses filled with a darker liquid.

"For you men, cocktails that are very strong!" announced Valerie shrilly, and Anne saw that she was trembling. "But for Sanna Laurelle—and for me—cocktails that I have prepared especially. For I know that Sanna Laurelle is a good little girl—and a famous star! She will not want a cocktail made of gin and lemon juice and sugar—but a cocktail made as only Valerie can make it! *Non, cherie?"*

Anne colored beneath the slightly contemptuous words, but accepted the glass that Valerie offered with a little murmur of thanks.

Some one had drawn Ricky away, and for the moment the two girls were alone together.

Ricky turned just as Valerie and Anne lifted their glasses. As Anne's glass touched her lips, something malevolent in Valerie's face struck Ricky, and he cried out sharply, at the same time springing toward Anne.

"Don't drink that!" he cried, and struck at the glass in Anne's hand. But he was too late. Already Anne had swallowed most of its contents.

The liquid slipped smoothly down her throat. And then Anne screamed with agony!

She threw up a hand, clasping her throat—clawing at the white-hot agony that was robbing her of her reason. She swayed, and Ricky caught her in his arms, trying to protect her from the hatred in Valerie's eyes.

"Get a doctor, quick!" he cried sharply. "You fiend!" to Valeria.

"I don't think a doctor will do her much good!" drawled the other girl, her voice malevolent, triumphant. "Oh, it won't kill her—it's merely an acid that will destroy the voice that Supreme Films is so crazy about! Yes—I gave it to her! Because I hate her!"

ANNE came back to consciousness with a memory of agony from which she shrank. Her throat felt lacerated and she lifted a weak hand to touch it. She tried to speak, but the effort was too painful. It was a week before she could do more than whisper the faintest, briefest little word.

In the glory of a late afternoon sunset she looked up to find Ricky beside her, watching her with worshiping eyes, holding her hand, bending his head now and then to set his lips against the cool pink palm.

"Well—little Anne Evans—are you going to stay awake long enough for me to tell you that I adore you?" he asked very low.

She blinked.

"Oh—then you've remembered

where we met before?" she whispered, with a ghost of mirth in the piteous little whisper.

"At last! It took an awful lot, though, to make me remember!" he admitted wryly. "But then you really can't blame me, darling—you were such a homely, pathetic little person. You really were, darling! How was I to know that I'd come back and find Aunt Melissa's favorite football a raving beauty and a screen sensation?"

At the last words a shadow flitted over her face. Ricky, with love's own prescience, read the thought.

"No, dearest, your screen career isn't over before it's really begun. The doctor says that your vocal chords are not seriously impaired; you got only a small amount of the acid, and you'll be right as rain in a couple of months. Supreme Films is getting a great story ready for your second picture. *Star Dust and Dreams* is breaking house records, by the way—people are crazy about it!"

"Valerie?" whispered Anne with a little shudder at the memory of the girl whose hate had caused her so much suffering.

Ricky's mouth tightened.

"Sailed for Europe the next morning, darling! Under oath never to return to this country, in return for the promise that she would not be prosecuted. Supreme Films—all of us—decided that was the wisest way. Her arrest and prosecution would have caused an ugly scandal that would have reacted against you almost as much as against her. So we had to let her go—very reluctantly, I assure you!" explained Ricky grimly.

"You might be interested to know—my dearest beloved—that *Love's Sacrifice* is not, after all, a total loss!" he told her. "It is being recut, retitled, and will be released as a farce comedy—a burlesque drama—and we believe it's going to be a big hit! Supreme Films has bought it from me. So, after all, beloved, it is not a penniless beggar who asks you to please, please try to think kindly of him so that some day, when he is very, very wise and very lucky—he may ask you to marry him!"

Anne gave a little tremulous sigh and closed her eyes.

Ricky waited—had he tired her too much? Had she fainted? He was about to rise, to ring for the nurse, when Anne opened her eyes, all misty with tears, and smiled at him—a ghost of a little, tremulous April smile that tugged at his heartstrings.

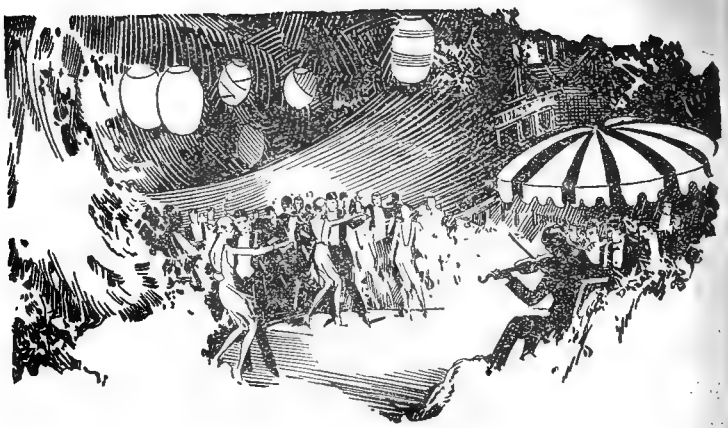
"I'm—not a very patient woman, so don't wait—too long, Ricky!" she whispered softly. "Remember—I've loved you for two years!"

"Sweetheart!" said the trembling Ricky.

"Dearest!" said Anne, in that tiny, piteous whisper.

He put his arms about her. Her own, feeble no longer, went about him, drawing him closer still. And when he bent his head, eager for the touch of her mouth on his, she lifted her face and gave him her lips with a sweetness of abandonment that sent a little thrill of ecstasy through him. Gladly, joyously, she gave him the stored sweetness of her love—the love that had grown in her heart during the years of star dust and dreams.

And Ricky, very proud, very humble, took the gift, adoring her.



Wooing Wings

High above the clouds lurked warning and danger, love—and denial for Mariel. What was her secret—why must she deny both lovers?

By Clelia S. Mount

CHAPTER I

"HASN'T he thrilling eyes?" Betty Devoe asked out of the hurried silence of the boudoir. "And isn't he distinguished? He makes me think," she added pensively, "of foreign courts, fêtes and all that sort of thing."

Mariel, inserting her small feet into absurdly high-heeled slippers of shining kid over stockings that were silver cobwebs, looked across at her younger sister. Betty was very attractive, dark-haired with a high, lovely color and deep carmine lips. She looked like a small, amorous gypsy with the coral hoops she had hung in each ear. Her eyes were lambent and luminous.

"Raoul Fernier," Mariel admitted, "is a very engrossing person. But don't you think he's just a trifle too old for you, Betty?"

"Old—fiddlesticks! Who wants these callow children who dash all over the place and don't know a thing about real love? Not I for one."

Filled with loyalty to Betty, Mariel struggled against him

The glance Mariel directed across the mauve and gold boudoir was speculative. Could it be possible that Betty was really in love with this French aviator who had come upon them so suddenly?

Raoul Fernier had known them both less than a month. The man—Mariel was sure he was in the middle thirties—had been introduced to them at the country club. He traveled incognito, and Mariel remembered how often she had read about Fernier, hero of the air and wartime ace. She supposed he used another name because he wished to escape the adulation and admiration of the crowd. And she wondered a little how much hero worship had to do with Betty's interest in the man—and her own.

To-night, she reflected, Raoul Fernier was coming to Six Trees, Marshall Devoe's Westchester estate. Out in the lantern-lit dusk of the murmurous evening she and Betty were giving the last dance of the waning summer.

"Better snap it up," Mariel observed, standing before the mirror to contemplate the fragile frock of blue crape that was a chalice for her youthful charms. "Plenty to do downstairs."

"Don't I know it?" With an effort Betty seemed to emerge from a spell

of dreaming to don her own dance frock. In it she was a delicate blossom with a smile as tender as an opening rosebud. "Oh, Mariel! I'm going to have every dance with Raoul if possible!"

IN the lower Italian gardens a dance floor had been built under swinging lanterns. An orchestra tuned there. The night bulked darkly back of the starry lantern gleams. When the dancing began Mariel sought Raoul Fernier, remembering what Betty had said in the boudoir. Her sister, however, was dancing with a slim, blond boy and further search revealed the fact that Fernier had not yet arrived.

Mariel had just finished a waltz when a hand slipped caressingly over her wrist and a quiet voice, piquantly spiced with an accent, spoke beside her.

"A thousand pardons. I flew my little one-seater Hornet over. It was so dark I could not find the polo field to land on. Then I had to wash and make myself presentable."

Mariel looked up into the dark eyes of Raoul Fernier.

For a Frenchman he was tall and his slenderness made him appear younger than he actually was. He had wavy black hair flung artistically back from a broad forehead. Under his leather flying suit he had worn a dinner coat. The white of his evening shirt accentuated his darkness, the boldness of his profile and his rather high cheek bones.

"You are forgiven," she declared lightly.

The beat of syncopation broke out. Fernier promptly seized her.

"Our dance," he stated briefly, and whirled her off across the floor.

His embrace was tight. He danced admirably, but Mariel felt he was drinking her in ardently. When she made her glance level with his she surprised a look of yearning in his face. It was new and strange. It almost frightened her.

"This is the last dance of summer," she told him, for want of something better to say. "Warm weather may linger on, the moon may be yellow, but to us here summer has gone."

"Beautifully expressed. What do you do with the passing of summer?"

Mariel shook her tawny head.

"We never know. It depends upon my father. We shall go back to town or perhaps cruise on his yacht."

"A yacht? How interesting. It must be pleasant to sail—carefree and at the will of the winds."

"The *Black Star* is a steam yacht," Mariel explained. "We don't have to depend upon the winds."

She sensed rather than saw Fernier's barely perceptible gesture. Something she had said had startled him.

"I beg your pardon. What did you say was the name of the yacht?"

"The *Black Star.*"

Fernier recovered his careless composure.

"Queer. Are stars black? I thought they were bright and luminous—like your eyes. No matter. It is a strange name for a boat. Let us forget it. This dance is ending and I have something to ask you."

SOMEWHAT against her will Mariel allowed the French aviator to lead the way beyond the dangling lanterns. She did not know why, but she felt she was being a traitor to Betty. They came upon a summer-house at the edge of a fountain that had trapped the sailing moon. The darkness wrapped them about like the fragrant cloak of a June night.

"I do not think your father, M. Devoe, likes me," Fernier began suddenly.

Mariel draped the Spanish shawl she had brought from the house across her sweetly sloping shoulders. She considered him with real astonishment.

"Why on earth should you think that?"

"Because he rebuffed me yesterday. I reverted to one of the customs of my homeland. I asked your father for permission to be your suitor and seek your hand in marriage!"

Mariel's lips parted. She felt bewildered, overcome. Was he jesting? Was he actually in love with her? She searched his face eagerly for traces of a smile. It was set and tense.

"You simply cannot mean—"

"I mean that I am in love with you!" Fernier cried throatily. "I've loved you from the first instant I saw you. You are the girl of my dreams. I love you and I want to take you back to France with me as my wife!"

The stars seemed to glow more whitely. The moon revolved fantastically and the bobbing lanterns blurred oddly before Mariel's vision. She could only remember Betty's interest in this man who leaned so ardently to her.

There was no denying the suave fascination of Raoul Fernier. Mariel had felt it during the short spell of their acquaintance. He was so different from the others she had known. He was a man of the world—a man who had known life and who had looked into the bright, exciting face of danger. Mariel's romances seemed pale, insignificant things beside Fernier's adoration. Happy, carefree romances that never lasted beyond the witching span of the summer months or the crisp winter moon— And yet—

Fernier had drawn closer to her. Her heart, filled with loyalty to Betty, struggled against him. Mariel was like a frightened child facing him, flushed and suddenly breathless.

"I didn't know that you cared that way," she half faltered.

Caressing hands found and took her own.

"I do." He sighed. "It is new to you—this burning love of mine. You do not understand. It confuses you."

Mariel rested her shoulder against the smooth side of the summerhouse.

"Yes, it does," she admitted faintly.

He made a gesture.

"But it has planted a flower in your heart. A flower that will open and grow. I do not want your answer now. You will think over what I have told you. An answer will come to you in dreams and then you will tell me. I shall be patient and wait. To love as I do is to wait."

They walked back toward the lantern circle.

Mariel had the feeling she had been cast in a dramatic rôle. Raoul Fernier's flowery declaration of love. The moon and the stars. The distant lilt of dance music. It was all theatric, unreal.

"You will tell me as soon as your answer comes, Mariel?"

She nodded, glad of an opportunity momentarily to evade him and find her lost understanding.

"Yes, I will tell you."

He pressed her hand gently.

"Then I can hope while I wait."

BACK with the others, Mariel saw Betty on the far side of the dance floor. She was sitting there alone and her starry eyes seemed shadowed by accusations. Her sister jumped up and came toward them. Fernier went

to her and a minute later both were on the dance floor.

Mariel drew a little apart from the others, and retraced the fleeting moments of the night. Why had Fernier appeared startled at the mention of the name of her father's yacht? Did he really and truly love her as much as he would have her believe? He said something about caring the very first instant he had met her. Was there a love that was born in a glance? A real, genuine, eternal devotion that came so quickly and unexpectedly?

Mariel had always known that some day a Prince Charming would arrive to storm the citadel of her heart. Until then she intended the youth that sped past her would not be in vain. She was twenty and Betty eighteen.

Tensely Mariel watched the masked man in the shadows

"I beg your pardon, Miss Mariel."

Leeds, the butler at Six Trees, loomed up before her. Mariel put away the tide of her reflections.

"What is it, Leeds?"

"Your father wishes to see you in his study, Miss Mariel."

Arranging her slinky skirts Mariel drew her delicately curved brows together. A vague foreboding touched her. What did Marshall Devoe want her for? It must, she told herself, be something of extreme importance that could not wait beyond the ending of the lantern dance. For the past week her father had been distrait, moody.

The study, brooding behind mullioned windows, was at the end of the long corridor. The door was open and Marshall Devoe sat before a heavily carved writing table. The single lamp

turned on full blaze was beside him and the chamber was aromatic with the scent of cigars.

"Come in and sit down, Mariel. You might close the door behind you."

She crossed to the enormous leather chair in which she had so often curled up during her little girl days. Devoe turned and appraised her silently. He was a rugged man, hardly showing his sixty-odd years. His heavy crop of hair was iron-gray. His face was strong but inscrutable. Left a widower when Mariel was six years of age and Betty four, he had brought up both girls with a firm gentleness tempered by a later indulgence.

Considering him, Mariel understood how changed Devoe had become in the past two months. He looked worn and secretly troubled. The brisk vigor that characterized him seemed dulled. Again she wondered what it was that worried him.

"I dislike taking you away from your guests," he began. "But I wanted to learn something. Yesterday Raoul Fernier interviewed me. He asked my permission to—"

SO that was it?

Mariel knew a quick wave of relief. Naturally her father would be anxious. She knew exactly how much he loved Betty and herself. They had always been just "we three." To have an engaging and handsome stranger destroy the combine would cause Marshall Devoe a pang or two. She jumped up and, going across, perched herself on the arm of his chair.

"Yes, I know. Raoul Fernier asked me to marry him to-night."

Her father's gray eyes remained steadfast with her own.

"And you? You accepted him?"

Mariel quickly shook her head.

"I don't know whether I love him or not. He is fascinating. But love—" She pursed her lips and laid a hand over her father's. "He asked me to think it over."

There was a silence. Abruptly, Devoe stood and walked across to the mullioned windows. He looked out into the dusk of the moon before he turned and slowly retraced his steps.

"Before you answer him," he said deliberately, "there is something you must know."

Mariel frowned. A heavy, serious note in his voice brought back her early forebodings.

"What is it, dad?"

"Before I tell you," Devoe continued, "I want you to promise me you won't divulge the secret to Betty."

"I promise."

He faced her and his wide, strong shoulders seemed to droop. It had grown very quiet. The beat of dance music was elfin in the distance. Only the stars seemed near at the windows.

"You and Betty are my foster children," Marshall Devoe told her in a thin, uncertain voice.

Mariel was conscious she had dropped down into the big leather chair. She peered up at him through an opaque mist. Her breath was caught in her throat and her heart skipped a beat before it raced.

"I am not your real father," Devoe continued. "Do not ask me for particulars, the story. To-night I can only tell you this. You and Betty are both my foster children by adoption."

The breath left Mariel's throat. Tears stung her wide, perturbed eyes. This man was not her real father. This man whom she loved so devotedly was no kin of hers. Yet he had cared for and guarded her with a tenderness no real parent could outdo.

"Why have you told me this?" Mariel heard a voice she recognized as her own asking.

Devoe faced her again.

"Because of what Raoul Fernier asked me yesterday. I have kept the secret all the years. To-night it is my duty to tell you. My revelation must influence your decision. I know you would not wish to give your answer to Fernier under false colors."

Mariel inclined her head. The first stunning effect of the disclosure ebbed. She understood Marshall Devoe's motive. She could not accept Raoul Fernier unaware of her own identity.

"Who am I if I am not Mariel Devoe?" she cried.

Devoe's arm went about her shoulders. He drew her to him and kissed her cheek. A tremor shook him.

"Sometime I will tell you. Not now. This alters nothing between us. You must still look upon me as your own father. You must still love me as I love you. Nothing has actually changed between us." He appeared to brighten. "Now kiss me and don't worry. And remember your promise. Not a word to Betty."

A moment later Mariel left the study.

She turned and looked back. Marshall Devoe had seated himself before the writing table. From a drawer he had taken a letter and was reading it. For the last time that night his shoulders seemed borne down under the burden of a great, invisible weight.

Mariel drew a deep breath and walked to the stairs.

In the garden they were waiting for her. Multicolored lanterns swaying. Music was weaving a background of melody and youth was calling to youth.

The high heels of her silver slippers rang out on the polished steps. The echoes were like voices asking one question. At each step the question whispered itself in Mariel's ear.

"Who am I?"

CHAPTER II

TO Mariel, on the morning after her visit to Marshall Devoe's study, Six Trees seemed a different place. Overnight its old, familiar charm had vanished. She felt herself a usurper, one who had no right within its ivy-grown portals. She had been reared within it, beneath its sprawling roof, but now she believed herself an intruder. It was an emotion that Mariel could not shake off.

In the stress of thought she had forgotten the early evening, the dusk of the summerhouse and Fernier's impassioned pleading. Mariel was to be reminded of the French aviator when Betty, smartly demure in tweed, wandered into the sun room for breakfast.

"Well, summer's really gone now. Gosh! I'm sorry—sorry and glad, too."

Mariel looked across the silver marmalade jug.

"Glad?"

"I mean," Betty amended, "there's always something to look forward to."

"Just what are you looking forward to?" Mariel inquired, envying her serene complacency. What would Betty say if *she* knew?

"Mr. Raoul Fernier," her sister explained candidly. "I never knew any one quite so fascinating. Wasn't he wonderful last night? Which reminds me. Where were you two when you came back to the garden?"

"Mr. Fernier wanted to tell me something."

"So he took you out to the summerhouse? What was it?"

"Nothing of importance." Mariel

caught a suspicious glint in Betty's stare. She knew she would have to dissemble. Not for anything must she allow the girl across the table to suspect. "Good heavens, are you concocting a romance for me simply because I happen to step out of the lantern light with him?"

"No," Betty replied naïvely. "I'm too busy concocting one for myself!"

With an effort Mariel forced herself to speak lightly.

"Meaning you are in love with Mr. Fernier, Betty?"

"Meaning, I don't know."

Mariel stirred her coffee slowly.

"After all," she continued, "what do we know about Mr. Fernier?"

Betty straightened up.

"What do we know? We know he's the famous French war ace with dozens of enemy planes to his credit. We know he's contemplating a transatlantic flight. What do you mean—what do we know?"

"We know he is fascinating, but that is all."

"You're thinking about his character," Betty murmured scornfully. "That doesn't bother me any. He's brave and a gentleman. That's enough for me. By the way, isn't father stodgy?"

The look Mariel directed at her was quick and speculative.

"Raoul asked me to go up with him in the Hornet. I asked father and he wouldn't give permission," Betty lamented.

Mariel reflected that Fernier had never asked her to go up for a flight in his two-seater plane. She remembered that several days later at the shore club. Coming off the beach, swathed in her red coolie coat, she encountered Raoul Fernier at the head of the steps that led to the colorful little campanas.

"Mariel! What a pleasure. I have been hoping to find you here."

"I haven't been anywhere in particular," she assured him.

"I know. It is my own fault. I was compelled to go to New York on business. Now I am back again and tomorrow I must leave at noon. So you see how eager I am to talk with you. Please meet me here when you are dressed."

Mariel wore her sun-back white silk dress and her vagabond felt. Betty was somewhere in the crowd on the miniature beach. She looked anxiously for the other when Fernier escorted her through the lower floor of the clubhouse and out on a deserted porch.

He turned to her eagerly.

"You have dreamed, Mariel. You have found your answer. The answer that means our happiness. Tell me what it is."

His pleading tone stirred her. If he was acting a part he was playing it with rare skill. The charm of him was very evident. It touched Mariel, brushing her like soft wings and leaving her disturbed and perplexed. Yet she saw her course, clear and open before her. Even if she loved him with all of her young heart she could not answer him as he wanted.

"I haven't made up my mind, Raoul."

"You do not love me!" he exclaimed bitterly.

"No, it isn't that. Since the—the other night something has happened that has made me hesitate. I won't tell you what it is, but you must know it is something of vast importance."

"What can be more important than love?"

Mariel turned her gaze toward the shimmering Long Island Sound. Could she tell him she was not Mariel De-

voe? That she was nameless, unaware of her own identity?

"Please—"

"I will continue to wait!" Fernier interrupted rapidly. "Some time soon my love will arouse your own. I know it! I am sure of it!"

The same fervor was in his voice, but Mariel imagined a false note. It was as if for an instant the actor had forgotten his lines. His glinting eyes sought the beach. Mariel wondered if he was looking for Betty, and then asked herself why she should wonder that.

"I will say good-by for a little while," Raoul Fernier told her. "Tomorrow, as I said, I shall be on the wing again. But I will come back to Six Trees and perhaps absence will help my cause."

THE roadster took both girls back to Six Trees toward twilight. Betty, at the wheel, drove with reckless speed. Mariel was too preoccupied to rebuke her. Would that talk in the study ever cease to haunt her? When would Marshall Devoe tell her whom she was?

"I'll tell you a secret if you'll promise not to give it away," Betty said when they stopped for a traffic light on the Post Road. "I disobeyed dad. Raoul took me up in the Hornet this afternoon. It was wonderful, thrilling. You won't give me away?"

Mariel looked at her with shadowed eyes.

"You shouldn't have gone."

"I know it. It was one of those impulses that just had to be obeyed. I think I'm in love with Raoul, Mariel. Is it love when you dream about a person, feel blue when they're not near and terribly happy when they are? Is that love?"

Something in Mariel's heart cried out. Once or twice she had known that exact feeling. Could it be, after all, that she did love the handsome aviator?

"I don't know," she answered so abruptly that Betty did not press the question.

Marshall Devoe was not at Six Trees when they reached the house. Betty dashed away to dress for dinner. Mariel, in the foyer, approached the mail rack. She sorted through the letters idly. There was nothing for her, but a quantity of mail for Devoe. One letter in a long gray envelope caught and arrested her attention. It was the same color stationery as the note she had left Devoe reading that night in the study. The letter that had made his shoulders sag as if under the weight of an invisible burden.

Mariel looked at the envelope. It was typewritten and postmarked New York. She was about to replace the mail in the rack when Leeds loomed up beside her.

"Begging your pardon, Miss Mariel. May I have that gray letter? Your father is very particular about them. I have to keep them separate."

Whatever the significance of the gray letter, Marshall Devoe was more cheerful at dinner than he had been in some weeks. His conversation was lively. To Mariel it seemed as if the weeks had taken her back to those happy days when she had been blissfully unaware of the shadow hanging over her.

"I want you girls in the study for a few minutes," Marshall Devoe said when Leeds served the coffee.

He led the way upstairs. Mariel followed with some misgiving. To her the study had become a chamber of dire secrets. Yet, Devoe's cheerful at-

titude belied any ominous confessions.

"You sit over there, Betty. Mariel, curl up in the big chair." Devoe lighted a long cigar. "I suppose you're wondering what this is all about."

"You bet!" Betty put in slangily.

lief that we three are headed for Long Island."

Betty's luminous eyes widened. She looked blankly across at Mariel.

"I say, why the mystery, dad?"

"Business reasons," Devoe an-

Mariel tripped and toppled directly into his arms

Mariel watched the man she had always believed to be her father. What was he going to tell them? She did not have long to wait.

"Children," Devoe continued, "I'm going to ask a favor of you. Tomorrow we're going for a sea trip on the yacht. I don't want you to mention it to any one. As a matter of fact I've taken particular pains to spread the be-

swered, but with such hesitation that Mariel intuitively understood it was not exactly the truth. "Haven't you ever read about financiers disappearing to steal a march on their Wall Street enemies?"

"Sounds good," Betty remarked. "Where is the jolly old *Black Star* going to take us?"

"For a pleasant ocean sail. Remem-

ber," Devoe warned them, "you're not to tell any one of our plans. We go on board to-morrow noon. Be packed and ready. You needn't," he added, "take any great amount of luggage."

In the gold and mauve boudoir Mariel pondered the latest turn of events. It was perfectly obvious to her that Marshall Devoe was deliberately planning to leave Six Trees for some mysterious reason. She thought back somberly. The gray letters, Devoe's nervous unrest and now the lightening of his spirits at the prospect of getting away from the Westchester estate. Mariel believed each thing dovetailed accurately.

But where were they going? What was the destination of the *Black Star?* More important, from what was this man she loved as a father fleeing?

Betty, invariably pleased at the prospect of change, enthusiastically tumbled her wardrobe into a small steamer trunk. Mariel, more circumspect in the matter of her own packing, listened to the other's magpie chatter absently. It was close to midnight when she sought her own room and prepared for bed.

Mariel did not feel sleepy. Her mind and imagination were vibrant with questions. She slipped on a brocaded negligee and sat on the tufted window seat. The mild night air caressed her warm cheeks. The moon was full and bright and the gardens, with their clumps of dense shrubbery, were paved with a silver carpet below.

The quiet lay tranquil and undisturbed. A tall grandfather's clock on the stair landing softly chimed the midnight hour. Then it struck the half hour sonorously.

Still Mariel peered out into the night, her mind a pendulum that swung from Raoul Fernier to the irking problem of her own identity. *Who was she?*

SHE was about to seek reluctantly the coolness of orchid sheets and a light coverlet when the flicker of a shadow below held her at the window. Mariel watched it on the silvered grass. Then, quite suddenly, she saw the shadow was made by the figure of a man who was moving slowly through the shrubbery.

She bent tensely forward, her heart increasing its beat.

The man stood beside a Japanese cherry tree. Mariel drew back into the darkness beyond the window. He had lifted his head and was scrutinizing the house. From the vantage point of gloom Mariel saw that the man's face and features were covered by a mask. Immovable she watched him, wondering whether or not to arouse Leeds and the other servants—to telephone down to the lodge-keeper who lived in the little cottage near the bronze gates of Six Trees.

While she debated the masked man set himself in motion again. Stepping away from the shelter of the cherry tree he shaped a course toward the side of the villa. At the risk of observation Mariel leaned out and watched him. There was a side entrance near the rounded glass face of the conservatory there. It was used principally as a quick means of getting down to the tennis courts or the garage, and it was to this entrance the man moved stealthily. He bent over, seeming to wedge something under the door.

Then he straightened up and, without a backward glance, glided into the ambush of the shrubbery and disappeared as silently as he had come.

Mariel descended noiselessly into the crouching dark of the lower floor. It

took only a minute or two to invade the passage under the front stairs and so come out upon the little vestibule back of the side door.

What the prowler had left was there, half under the door. Even before Mariel leaned breathlessly and picked it up she seemed to know it was one of those long gray envelopes. This one bore no stamp or postmark. It was addressed to Marshall Devoe in ink. She clutched it to her and hurried up the stairs to her bedroom. Would this communication, left so secretively, yield a clew to the drama hedging her in?

Mariel switched on the night light and drew out the inclosure.

The words were five in number and read:

This is the last warning.

CHAPTER III

TWO days later Marshall Devoe's yacht, the *Black Star*, was off the rugged coast of Maine. To Mariel, lounging in a wicker chair astern under a gayly striped awning, the world she penetrated would have been far more enjoyable had her mind been less harried. Never before had she so envied Betty's high and youthful spirits.

Mariel had made no reference to the gray letter. The third morning when the *Black Star* anchored in Frenchman's Bay under the frowning cliffs of Bar Harbor, and Betty had gone ashore in the tender to lunch with some friends, Marshall Devoe brought his cigar aft and Mariel determined to learn what she could.

"This letter came the night before we left," she began, handing the gray note to Devoe and telling him how she had come by it.

He took it and read it without changing expression. Mariel expected him to destroy it. Instead he folded it carefully and placed it in his pocket.

"I should have given it to you the next morning. I didn't want to worry you," she explained.

"It makes no difference," Devoe answered colorlessly. For a long minute he smoked in silence. "I suppose you realize now why I wanted our destination to remain unknown."

"Yes, I think I do. Can't you tell me—anything?"

Devoe shook his head.

"Nothing."

Mariel bent forward.

"Not even who I am?" she pleaded.

His hand gripped hers and clung tightly.

"Not even that—yet."

The pang of disappointment was like a sword in her heart. The drama must be even more formidable, Mariel imagined, than she could realize. It hurt her to know this man beside her was fighting it alone, in secret. She must not make it any harder for him.

"Then I'll wait—dad. I know," she said bravely, "that whatever you do is for our own good. I'll try my best to be patient. Oh, I wish I could help you in some way."

Devoe smiled.

"I have reason to believe the worst is past now."

"Surely," Mariel said, "you can tell me where we are going?"

"Yes, I can tell you that. We go to Long Lake."

"Your lumber camp!" Mariel exclaimed.

"A week ago I wired MacIntosh to put one of the island camps in readiness. I am leaving you girls in Big Mac's care. Tell me," he broke off, "what of your French aviator? What answer did you finally give him?"

Mariel tightened her red lips.

"I—I didn't give him any answer. He is still waiting."

Devoe dropped the subject. Standing, he trained his binoculars on the distant shore.

"The tender's coming back. I can see Betty's red sweater." He lowered the glasses and turned seriously to Mariel. "I'm relying on you to acquaint Betty with our ultimate destination. Make her think that the shanty at Long Lake is in the nature of a vacation."

"I don't know how she's going to take it," Mariel declared slowly. "Betty never cared particularly for roughing it."

As it happened, the dark-haired girl took the news indifferently.

"Long Lake," she said, dangling her fashionably slender silk legs over the edge of one twin bed in their stateroom. "That means fried trout and Big Mac and cold water to wash in and no jazz or rowdy good times for a couple of weeks. Oh, well, you can get used to anything. If dad gets a kick out of it it's oke with me."

ROCKFORD HARBOR loomed out of the morning mists while Devoe, Betty and Mariel were breakfasting. There the Maine coast lost its color. The Bay of Fundy was not far distant. From the mouth of the harbor fishing smacks were emerging. Venturesome little craft with patched sails and sturdy seamen at the tillers. They went winging across the breeze-ruffed sea like dream ships seeking far ports of romance.

At four in the afternoon they reached Cranston Junction. It was while Marshall Devoe awaited the automobile caravan that was to take them through to the Loup Chain of lakes that Mariel ran into adventure.

A small store down the road from the depot sold ice cream and cold drinks. Leaving Betty in what shade the station afforded, Mariel went down the dusty road. While she sipped some pinkish beverage through a straw she heard the hum of an airplane outside.

"Lance Thayer," the woman who ran the store said. "He's with the Forest Air Patrol. He'll be coming in for gas about now."

Mariel paid no attention. The sound of the plane sent her mind back to Raoul Fernier and Six Trees. She started toward the door and as she did so had a violent encounter with a young man who was in the act of entering.

Mariel tripped and toppled directly into his arms. Her face was pressed to a leather jacket that reeked of gasoline and oil. Two arms held her steadily, while gray eyes regarded her with interest and admiration.

"I beg your pardon. Not hurt, are you?"

"I don't think so," Mariel murmured, when he released her.

Tall and well built, with rough, tumbled hair and a sun-bronzed skin, his smile was warm and friendly. He looked rakish and debonair in his flying things.

"I'm Lance Thayer. You must be Miss Devoe."

"How on earth did you know that?"

He gestured toward a wide lake down the hill from the store. A white hydroplane was moored there.

"Forest Air Patrol," he explained. "It's rather my business to know things. Anyway, Big Mac at your father's camp told me you were expected. May I ask if you're Miss Mariel or Miss Betty?"

"I'm Mariel Devoe."

He repeated the name.

"Mariel. I like that name. It's odd. Won't you come in and have some refreshments? They're not much, but they're better than nothing."

"Oh, I just sampled something," Mariel smiled.

He held out a strong, brown hand.

"I hope I see you at Long Lake, Miss Devoe. Would you mind very much if I dropped down at your doorstep some evening?"

Looking up into his smiling gray eyes, Mariel knew the stir of her lazy pulses. She could not explain it, but as their glances met she knew a strange, deep, nameless urge.

"I—I don't think I'd mind very much."

"Then expect me," Lance Thayer said.

MARIEL retraced her steps to the depot and Betty. The small automobiles had arrived and the baggage was being put aboard them. Mariel's thoughts were very far-away. She glanced in the direction of the white plane and remembered the feel of Lance Thayer's leather coat against her cheek.

She had been in his arms! He had held her for one swift minute! She wondered if that was what stirred her so.

"Snap out of it, Mariel." Betty's voice aroused her. "You act as if you were in love!"

In love!

Mariel's heart beat faster. She climbed into the second Ford. Marshall Devoe gave the word and the caravan started.

When they passed the store, Lance Thayer was in the doorway. He waved and Mariel flung up a hand in answer.

"How foolish I am!" she thought. "I don't know a thing in the world about him."

"Say! Who's the handsome young aviator?" Betty demanded.

Mariel explained. Her sister's small smile grew.

"So *he* was the one you were dreaming about?"

"Please don't be so ridiculous," Mariel scoffed.

"Day dreaming about," Betty continued. "And all the time I thought you'd lost your aristocratic heart to the fascinating French ace."

The twilight had settled when they reached Long Lake.

Out of the crowd Big Mac emerged. He had been with the Devoe industry since its beginning. Mariel remembered him as a child. His leathery face, shrewd Scotch eyes and the jaws that were never still on the tobacco cud stuffing out one cheek. He was a huge man and she took refuge in his brawn. No harm from a hidden enemy could strike at them while Jab MacIntosh stood guard!

A motor boat took them across the silken surface of the dreaming lake. The island they were to inhabit, with its rough, weather-beaten shanty, was around the second bend. The bonfire and the faces of the men were lost in the night. When they reached their shelter another fire was burning on the hearth and the place had been swept clean.

"I suppose," MacIntosh began, when he and Devoe had lighted pipes on the tiny screened porch of the shack, "you've been hearing considerable about our air raider."

Mariel, unpacking in the front bedroom, straightened up and listened.

"Seems to me I have heard something," Devoe replied idly.

"When I was a young 'un," Big

Mac went on, "I used to read about sea pirates. Air pirates are something new to me."

"Air pirates?"

"That's about what you'd have to call this chap. Dangerous and desperate, he is. Robbed the post office up at the Loup no more than a week ago. They say he smuggles stuff over the Canadian line, too. All around bad customer."

"Can't any one get him?" Devoe asked.

Mariel heard MacIntosh's grunt of contempt.

"If they can, why don't they, I say? The Government starts this Forest Air Patrol up here but a lot of good it does. They've got twenty or more planes on the job and every so often this air pirate slips through 'em without any trouble. I was talking to young Lance Thayer just the other morning. Lance is one of the best sky-riders in the Patrol. I asked him why he didn't do something. He said he is going to bag this pirate before the month is out. Tall talking, I call it."

Mariel filled a bureau drawer with some of the dainty pink lingerie she had brought with her. Her thoughts concerned Lance Thayer until the conversation on the porch penetrated her misty imaginings.

"This pirate must have a landing place," Marshall Devoe pointed out. "Why doesn't the Patrol find out where it is and put an end to him?"

Big Mac chuckled.

"Easier said than done. Mr. Pirate flies over at night without lights. You hear his motor and then he's gone. He's

She opened her eyes as a familiar face bent above her. "Lance," she whispered

got a cache hereabouts in the woods but try and find it. Or try and catch a glimpse of his black plane."

"Black plane?"

"It's the color of the machine that gave him the name he goes by."

"What name is that, Mac?" Devoe asked.

Mariel closed the bureau drawer softly. She listened intently.

"They call him," MacIntosh explained, "the Black Star!"

CHAPTER IV

MARSHALL DEVOE left for Canada on business two days later and the same evening Lance Thayer kept his promise.

Mariel, in the cook shed of the shanty, heard the drone of a plane and then Betty's tones.

"Mariel! Some one to see you. Better shake the apron and come out."

For one instant her heart skipped an errant beat. She hurried into the bedroom and dusted her glowing cheeks with powder. She had time for only a glance at her own radiance before there were steps on the veranda.

"Look what I've found!" Betty laughed, when Mariel went out.

Lance Thayer stood in silhouette against the curtain of the twilight. He seemed even more attractive than he had the day Mariel first met him. His gray eyes darted to her and his hand had a magnetic touch when she slipped her pretty fingers into it.

"I've asked Mr. Thayer for dinner," Betty announced. "Speedy work inasmuch as he just introduced himself to me. You entertain him and I'll take charge of the kitchen."

"I'm a good hand at peeling potatoes," Thayer declared. "I won't stay if you're going to fuss."

Betty chuckled.

"After you get a meal here you probably won't want to stay!"

Mariel sat down beside Thayer on the top step of the little porch. The day had drawn at last into evening. She asked Thayer about the mysterious Black Star. He told her how the air pirate blackmailed property owners. If they refused to pay him tribute the Black Star dropped incendiary bombs that started forest fires on their holdings. He had whirled from the sky to pounce upon a pay roll being conveyed to another logging camp on the Canadian side of the Senebac.

Deep contentment filled Mariel. It was nice to be beside this man in the purple dusk. Nice to hear the amiable drawl of his pleasant voice and see the flash of his gray eyes. His laugh rang out and stirred her again.

"Why do I like him so much?" she asked her heart.

She asked herself the same question many times during the days that followed. She was seeing a good deal of Lance Thayer. He had taken her aloft in the white hydro for her first flight and Mariel knew she would never forget the thrill of it. The illimitable air spaces. The sailing clouds and the world below, spread out like a toy universe.

Curiously, she was not the least bit frightened. Thayer was so sure of himself. She didn't know why but she had every confidence in him.

It was shortly after the flight that Mariel began to realize Lance Thayer was in love with her. There could be no mistake. It was in the gleam of his gray eyes, the sound of his voice and the touch of his hands. She had known that Raoul Fernier loved her. Now intuition told her the young skyrider cared in that same way.

What of herself?

Long after she had crept into bed at night and the autumnal cold from the lake filled the room Mariel lay sleepless, wondering if love had come at last.

She remembered what Betty had asked her once about the French ace. Was it love when you dreamed of a person, felt blue when they were not near and terribly happy when they were?

TOWARD the end of the second week Mariel left Betty complacently fishing from the small crib dock at the island. She took one of the canoes and paddled off to the south. Ten years past Big Mac had taught her the strong, even paddle stroke she used. Digging the blade deep into the swoon of emerald waters, Mariel passed the scattering of huge granite blocks and presently discovered that she was in forbidden territory.

Not alone Marshall Devoe, but Jab MacIntosh as well, had cautioned her about the lake where it lay close to the gaping mouth of the Senebac. The water was treacherous there, hidden rocks were lying in wait for the unwary and the Senebac Rapids were beyond.

The hint of danger did not check Mariel. She paddled on, only half hearing the distant roar of the rapids. Thayer, in fancy, was beside her. How young and attractive he was! Thayer had none of Raoul Fernier's worldly polish. Mariel was glad of that. She could admire him more as he was. The water seemed to sing a song to her and her eyes grew dark with dreams.

"I love him!" her heart cried out. "I love Lance Thayer!"

The confession thrilled her with ecstasy. A loon, long-necked and sleek, dived and arose to the surface yards away. Suddenly, the tug of the water hastening the lazy progress of the canoe aroused Mariel. Her fragile craft seemed caught in an invisible current. Against her will and the strength she forced into her paddle, the canoe hurried toward an opening in the shore.

It was the mouth of the Senebac, narrowing into the rushing rapids!

The canoe was whirled along relentlessly. Mariel sought desperately to escape the danger. In a little more than a dizzy round of seconds she understood how unequal and futile the battle was. Unseen hands hurled the canoe toward the sluice of the rapids. Her strength deserted her. She held the dripping paddle aloft and tried to think.

Dare she risk jumping overboard and swimming to the shore?

While she was hesitating the canoe reached the mouth of the river and, with express speed, was shot into the rapids!

Before her frightened gaze Mariel saw the churning leap of water and the jagged threat of rocks. With eyes wide in terror she tossed the paddle away and clutched the gunwales. Faster and faster! The spray stung her white, set face. The roar of the rapids was like the crash of doom.

Fantastic rememberings crowded her mind. Fernier in the dusk of the summerhouse. Marshall Devoe in his study. A sun-bronzed boy whose leather jacket was against her cheek. Gray letters and a masked figure in the moonlight—

The jumble of recollections ended quickly.

The canoe dashed against one of the jagged rocks and Mariel was thrown struggling into the whirling foam of

waters. She tried to swim, but the press of the flood seemed to shut off her breath. She felt herself going under, sinking and, blindly, knew it must be the end.

DARKNESS engulfed her a dizzy minute after she felt strong hands tearing her from the torrent.

"Mariel! Mariel, dearest!"

A voice that came from miles away whispered through the darkness. She opened her eyes and vaguely recognized a familiar face bent above her. Wet, sodden and dishevelled, Mariel found she was lying on the turf of one bank. The rapids were below, roaring their disappointment impotently.

Lance Thayer's arms were around her for the second time. Off in a clearing somewhere to the left his white plane glimmered in the waning sun.

"Lance!" she whispered thinly.

"Mariel! Thank God!" His voice shook. "Mariel, I love you! I love you, dearest!"

A sweetness engulfed her. Mariel sighed tremulously. Lance loved her! Her heart had not deceived her.

She closed her eyes while Thayer's lips found her own in a long, clinging kiss. Awakened and recollecting, Mariel's eyes fluttered open. She pressed her hand over her fast-beating heart.

"Don't—Lance!" she faltered.

Into the sweetness had stolen a quick bitterness. Tormenting questions loomed up to agonize her.

Who was she?

And what of Raoul Fernier and his love for her?

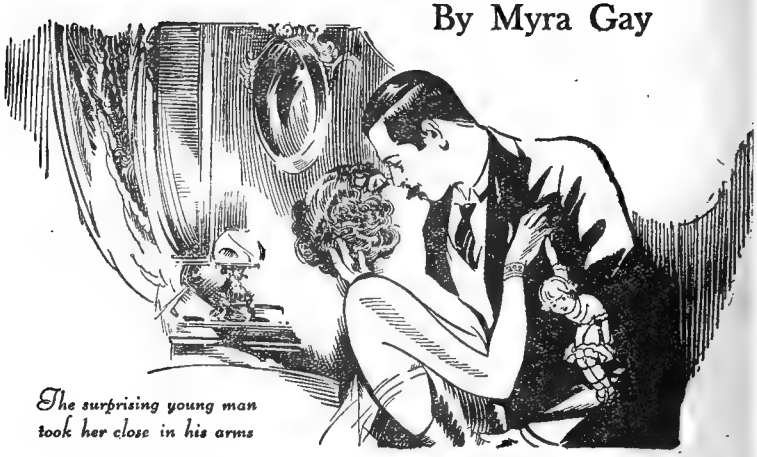
Miracle

SOFTLY I touch them
Lips you like to kiss;
To myself I've grown dearer
Since I've brought you bliss!
Bright day and sunshine
Follow dark and dew;
So pain has changed to rapture
Since I met you.

—*Helen K. Roberts*

Fate!

By Myra Gay



The surprising young man took her close in his arms

A strange destiny made her twice a bride in two days

KAY adjusted her veil with a steady hand. Then she gazed at her reflection in the mirror. The veil wasn't a bit becoming. She had known it wouldn't be. But Aunt Lou had insisted that a Russian-type wedding veil was the most fashionable thing just now. That had been enough to settle the matter.

"It's beautiful on you!" gushed Aunt Lou, clasping her hands. "Just perfectly beautiful! Isn't it, Eleanor?"

"Ye-es," said Eleanor hesitatingly. "I wonder if we couldn't pull the headdress part a little further over her face, though."

"That might be better," agreed Aunt Lou. "There, how's that?" She gave the veil a jerk.

Kay felt like a doll being dressed. It was funny, she thought to herself; her wedding—and she really hadn't a thing to do with it!

She had hardly been consulted on anything. The frock she wore was a beautiful creation, but it was a delicate shell-pink and Kay had always dreamed of being married in white. Her sheer stockings had embroidered clocks on the sides. Kay hated stockings with clocks! Her slippers were white velvet. Aunt Lou had thought

them a bit different from the ordinary slipper. Kay had wanted the conventional satin; but in that, as in everything else, she had been overruled.

On the bed was a big box from the most expensive florist on Fifth Avenue. Kay had taken one look at her bridal bouquet within and laughed; it was the only time she had laughed during the whole week preceding the wedding. Calla lilies, with sprays of lily-of-the-valley in shower arrangement! Kay felt as if she were attending her own funeral. Peekskill wasn't particularly noted for his sense of humor, she thought to herself. But, after all, she found out that the bouquet had been Aunt Lou's fault, too. Peekskill had wanted to get orchids, but Aunt Lou had voted for something more dignified—so he had got calla lilies.

There was a knock at the door, and Mary Barnes came in. Mary was to be Kay's other attendant. Eleanor, being Kay's cousin, was maid of honor; Mary the bridesmaid. Kay had wanted her chum, Sue Lane, but Aunt Lou had insisted on Mary, since Mary was Peekskill's sister. In that, as in everything else, Aunt Lou had emerged victorious.

"How perfectly peachy you look!" said Mary vivaciously. "A beautiful bride. And my dear, how cool and collected you are! I'd never guess that you were the one who was going to be married in ten minutes. Never in the world. Aren't you even the least bit nervous, dear?"

"No," said Kay. "Why should I be?"

Inwardly she was thinking:

"It might be different if I were marrying the man I loved. But this way I can't realize it's actually me. It must be some one else who is marrying Peekskill Sylvester Barnes, Jr.! Kay Larrimore couldn't be doing such an absurd thing."

"No, why should she be?" echoed Aunt Lou. "Isn't she completely ready ten, no, twelve whole minutes before the ceremony takes place? There's nothing for her to be nervous about. Nothing at all."

Just then Kay spoke, surprising even herself. "I'd like to spend this twelve minutes entirely alone, if you don't mind," she said mildly.

"But—" twittered Aunt Lou.

"Come on, mother!" Eleanor linked her arm in Aunt Lou's. Protestingly, Aunt Lou submitted to being dragged away.

Mary Barnes followed.

"We'll be back in ten minutes," said Aunt Lou from the doorway. "Don't sit down or your dress will crush!"

"I won't, Aunt Lou."

THE door closed. Kay stared at the door and then drew a deep breath. It was as though she hadn't been using the full capacity of her lungs for ages—ever since her engagement had been announced.

She wondered when she would get over this wooden feeling of being just half alive. The whole thing had been so strange. She hadn't wanted to marry Peekskill at all, and she had a sneaking idea that he wasn't so anxious to wed her, either. But Aunt Lou had managed it. She had a genius for managing things. From infancy, Aunt Lou had managed Kay's life with a competent hand. That was one of the reasons Kay had yielded to pressure and promised to marry Peekskill. She would escape in a measure from the domination of Aunt Lou.

Kay had money. More money than she knew what to do with. Not that the money had ever brought happiness.

Quite the contrary. And Peekskill had position, a name to open society's most inflexible doors. Kay hadn't any social aspirations and she hated Peekskill's name. It reminded her of a range of mountains or something. But she was marrying him—because Aunt Lou had insisted.

Now that she thought about it, the reason seemed very insufficient.

Kay took off the wedding veil and laid it on the bed next the bouquet. She tiptoed to the door and opened it a crack. There was no one about. On flying feet she sped to the back stairs, at the foot of which, next the servants' quarters, was her old playroom. There was something she wanted—her old rag doll that had been her childhood companion through many wild adventures. She was going to thrust Cora into her suitcase and take her along. A silly idea, but Kay had made up her mind.

The door to the playroom was open. Kay dashed in and went straight to the cabinet where were tumbled all her old toys. She fumbled about until she found Cora.

"I beg your pardon!" said a voice behind her.

KAY started nervously. She wheeled and faced a good-looking young man.

He smiled at her. "Did you get away from that silly mob in there," he pointed toward the living room, "same as I did?"

"I—" Kay was at a loss. She felt distinctly silly. In one hand was dangling Cora's gangling form. She put her hand behind her.

"Wedding's are sort of absurd, aren't they?" went on the young man. "I mean fussy weddings. Now if I were going to be married, I'd like to have the wedding out in a garden, or on a ship at sea, or in some setting that had majesty and romance."

"That — that sounds interesting," gasped Kay.

It was evident that he did not guess she was the bride. Without the veil, and in the shell-pink gown, she looked not unlike any of the fashionably attired guests.

"The main reason I sneaked away," he went on confidingly, "was because people talked so—so disgustingly—out there."

Again he gestured toward the living room, where Kay could hear a buzz of conversation, even from that distance.

"What did they say?" asked Kay. She was finding this young man unlike any one she had ever known. He was tall and lithe and his face was bronzed and lean. He had the look of out-of-door places. His blue eyes were steadfast and straightforward. His hair was exceedingly black and straight as an Indian's.

"Those people are guests under this roof, yet they are saying that this isn't a love match at all—just a marriage of convenience. She's got money, and he's got an old family name. Beastly of them to talk like that!"

"Maybe they're—right," she said with a little catch in her voice. "Would you think it so awful? If what they said—were true?"

His young face looked stern. "Of course I would. A person ought to marry for just one thing: love!"

Kay wetted dry lips. "Isn't that—old-fashioned?" she ventured.

"Old-fashioned as time itself. And just as changeless."

He had a lovely voice, Kay thought to herself. Deep and with a timbre in it that stirred her strangely. She found herself liking him very much.

"You don't live here in Washington?" she asked.

"No. My home is out West. But I've been traveling around for a few years—South America, Africa—places like that."

FORGETFUL of Cora, Kay clasped her hands. "I'd love that!" she cried. "I've always been wild to travel to out-of-the-way places. Not just London and Paris."

He gazed at Cora. "What's that?" he asked.

Kay blushed. "It—it's a doll that I used to play with a lot when I was a child," she said. "I—I was here at the wedding, and I remembered about Cora, and I came to get her." She looked at the clock on the side wall. "I have to leave now." She was wishing she didn't have to go, that she could keep on talking to this interesting man with the keen blue eyes and the kindly mouth.

"You don't look as though you belonged here," said the young man abruptly.

He came quite close.

"What do you mean?" Kay was intrigued.

"That sounded odd, didn't it?" he smiled. "I have an unfortunate habit of saying what I think without stopping to figure how impertinent it's going to sound."

"I don't mind," replied Kay earnestly, one eye on the clock. "Please tell me why you said that."

"Because you're real!" He took her hand, as simply as though he had been used to doing that all his life. Queer little prickles of excitement shot clear to Kay's shoulder. "You aren't a bit like these other people. They're mere automatons, doing the things they know they should. The things that are 'correct.' But you—live."

"Oh," said Kay—a mere breath of sound.

Her heart was thudding madly.

"I'm an engineer. My work takes me to all the far places of the earth. That's why I know a real person when I see one. You are. And you don't look happy."

"I—I'm all right," said Kay. Her voice trembled.

"I'm afraid I'm going to lose you." He tightened his grip on her hand. "Somehow I have the feeling that you're going to vanish in a moment, like Cinderella at twelve o'clock. I've noticed you watching the time."

How observing he was! Kay curved her mouth into a smile that went no deeper than her lips.

"The wedding," she said slowly. "I—have to be there."

"What a pity! I'm not going to stay. I came because I'm a distant cousin of Peekskill's, and he asked me to be here. But I don't want to stay—now. My evening is perfect. I have no wish to spoil it."

"Why is it perfect?" Kay knew she should not ask that question, but it asked itself.

"Because I have met you—and you are my ideal. The girl I have dreamed about all my life," he answered slowly. "You'll think it strange for me to tell you that. In your world, the man would equivocate, evade, wait until he knew the girl reciprocated his—love."

Kay's fingers burned like fire in his grasp. She felt as though she had been running a long race and had come at last in sight of the goal line. "I'm glad you've—told me," she said. "It will be something for me to remember."

"Nothing more than that?"

She shook her head. "I'm afraid not."

"To-morrow I sail for Bermuda. There is some business I must attend to before I go on back to South America. Bermuda! Such a lovely island. White coral houses; beautiful trees; turquoise seas, and best of all, pink coral sand."

"Pink coral!" repeated Kay dreamily.

"Come and take that trip to Bermuda to-morrow! Slip away from all the worries that are besetting you. Let me show you this delightful island of romance. Don't let this narrowing life get you for always. Don't be fettered by circumstances."

Kay drew back a trifle.

"I couldn't, of course," she said drearily.

"Perhaps you have misunderstood. I wouldn't ask anything of you—until you were ready to be my wife."

"Wife!" Kay's eyes grew dark.

"Of course. There's going to be only one woman in the world for me. I always knew that. But I sometimes wondered if I were ever going to find her. Now I have! Don't you see, dear? I understand that something is troubling you. If you could take a trip, away from all these bothersome things, they would assume their right proportions. Travel does that—travel to tropical lands. There would be moonlight nights when I could begin in some measure to tell you of my love. There would be—"

The clock was striking. From the living room came the first strains of the wedding march.

"Oh!" said Kay. "I must go."

"Without telling me your name?" He was retaining his grip on her hand.

"Marie," said Kay quickly. That was her middle name.

"Marie!" He repeated the name. Her heart was thudding like mad.

"And the last name?"

She shook her head.

"No," she said wildly.

"It doesn't matter," said the surprising young man. "We weren't meant to meet like this only to lose track of each other. I'll find you again." He took her close in his arms. The shell-pink frock gave a rustle of disapproval.

"Dearest!" said the young man softly. Then he laid his lips on Kay's in a kiss that made her feel as though the world were tottering.

AFTER a long time she tore herself out of his arms. Madly she ran up the stairs, stumbling and tripping at every step. Her heart was beating wildly; her pulses were throbbing from the ecstasy of his kiss. And in her ears was the hateful sound of the wedding march being played over and over.

"Kay Larrimore!" said Aunt Lou in a horrible voice as Kay jerked open the door and came into the bedroom. "Where have you been? I've been having hysterics—yes, hysterics! But a lot you care, you ungrateful child." Tears were streaming down her face.

Kay faced her. "I'm sorry," she said, fighting for control. "I went down to get Cora." She indicated the doll hanging limply from her hand.

"And do you realize that downstairs two hundred people are beginning to wonder if Peekskill is being jilted? That—"

"I wouldn't do a caddish thing like that," said Kay slowly. She was putting on the hated wedding veil. "I shall keep my word."

"But—"

"Let's not waste time talking," Eleanor broke in. "We must start."

"Better fix your lip rouge, dear," said Mary Barnes. "It's rather smeared."

Kay looked quickly into the mirror. Her face was so pale it frightened her. She adjusted the rouge with a shaking hand; then added a little color to her wan cheeks. She drew a deep breath.

"And now shall we go?" she asked. "I'm quite ready."

It seemed an eternity, descending the broad, flower-decked stairs. On each step she paused, as she had been taught to do at the rehearsal. There was a rustle of excitement as the crowd of fashionably attired people massed in the drawing-room caught sight of her.

The wedding march sounded hideously loud in her ears as she slowly advanced; everything else seemed very far away. Even Peekskill, waiting at the elaborate flower altar, didn't seem real. His face was rather red, and he kept fumbling with the fastenings of his white gloves.

The next thing Kay was aware of was the sound of her own voice repeating those terrifyingly final sounding vows; Peekskill muttered his replies.

It was all over.

Every one was kissing her and congratulating Peekskill. She was Mrs. Peekskill Sylvester Barnes, Jr. The thought was devastating.

The reception—the wedding breakfast. It seemed an eternity before Kay could slip upstairs and throw off the despised wedding gown and the hated veil. She was vaguely conscious that the girls were helping her dress in the gray going-away suit, richly furred.

Aunt Lou wandered about, hindering more than she helped. "I know my little girl is going to be so happy!" she wept into her frilled handkerchief. Kay felt a sudden terrible loneliness sweep over her. She yearned for her own long-dead mother.

She longed to say: "Nonsense! How could you hope that I'd be happy when I'm marrying a man I don't love—that I hardly know?" Instead, she only pulled on the little tight-fitting hat. "Peekskill will be getting impatient," she said.

Everything seemed like a scene on the stage. Only one thing in the mad, chaotic day was real: the kiss that still tingled on her lips. She hated to think of Peekskill kissing her. He hadn't kissed her at the conclusion of the ceremony. "I dislike any public display of sentiment," he had told her. Kay had been glad.

She tossed her bouquet.

"Good-by," they were all saying, as she ran down the same steps she had descended so regally only a short hour before. Peekskill met her, looking very dignified and a trifle bored with the whole proceeding. Some of the wedding party squeezed in the cab with them; a great number were at the station to see them leave on the train.

WHEN the train pulled out, she and Peekskill stood on the rear platform and waved till the party were out of sight. Then they went back to their compartment and sat stiffly, gazing at each other.

"Do you know," Kay said swiftly, "that this is the very first time we've been alone together since you proposed?"

"We weren't alone then," corrected Peekskill. "Your aunt was present. Indeed, it was she who—er—er—gave me the idea that my—my suit would not be unpleasing to you." He lapsed into silence.

Kay took off her hat and smoothed down the shining waves of her hair.

"And now we *are* alone," she said in a queer, bitter tone. "And we haven't anything to say to each other! I don't know you, and you don't know me! The worst of it is, neither of us feel like making any effort to understand each other. It—"

"I hope you are not one of these young girls who like to analyze their emotions." Peekskill's nose quivered like that of a rabbit. "I think that is very unbecoming in a woman — most unbecoming!"

He took out a newspaper and became engrossed in its pages.

The door burst open. "Terry!" sobbed Kay thankfully

Kay's eyes snapped; but she sat quite still. She was curious to know just how long he would read the newssheet.

She found out. An hour later he was interestedly poring over the pages of the financial section.

"Figuring out what stocks my money will buy?" Kay flung at him finally.

"Yes," he answered without thinking. Then an ugly red rose in his cheeks. "That remark was in bad taste," he said. "Extremely bad taste."

"It was true, just the same," said Kay doggedly. "You don't love me, even a little, do you?"

"A foolish, old-fashioned idea, my dear child!" He shrugged. "Marriages are made for convenience in these enlightened days."

A sentence echoed in Kay's ears: "Love is as old-fashioned as time—and as changeless!" The memory of that sentence gave her courage.

"You don't love me, do you?" she persisted. "You merely married me for my money?"

An angry light came into Peekskill's rather piggish eyes.

"If you insist on carrying on this absurd discussion," he said, "I will leave this drawing-room and seek quarters elsewhere on this train! I do not have to discuss my reasons for marrying you. It should be sufficient for you that I have bestowed upon you my time-honored name."

"Oh!"

Kay sprang to her feet. She pressed the button near the door. Again and again she jabbed with a furious finger until a sleepy porter answered the summons.

"Yassam!" he yawned.

"Are there any other drawing-rooms in this car? Unoccupied, I mean."

He nodded. "Right next door am one."

She took a ten-dollar bill from her purse and handed it to him. "I'll take that room. You needn't say anything to any one. Understand? Those are my suitcases."

"Yassam!" At sight of the money the porter woke sufficiently to take her luggage into the next compartment.

To Peekskill, who was angrily sputtering, she said, "I'll talk to you in the morning!" and slammed the door shut after her.

WHEN she was alone thoughts came to torture her. Pictures milled about in her mind: Peekskill reading the newspaper; the nice young man smiling down at her in such a friendly way; the wedding dress she hated; the Russian veil; Aunt Lou's face; the young man's kiss—

"Kay Larrimore," she said aloud, "all your life you've done as some one else told you. Now, for the first time, you're going to show some spunk!"

She got out her pen and wrote several notes, tearing up each one until she had achieved the effect she wished:

DEAR PEEKSKILL:

Enclosed is a check. I hope the amount will prove sufficient to compensate for the use of your name, especially since I don't intend to use that name—now or ever. It won't be necessary for people to know that I've run away. No one need be the wiser for some time; then we can be divorced. I'll never remain with a man who prefers a newspaper to a wife!

If you make any attempt to trace me, or if you communicate with the police, I shall stop payment on this check.

KAY LARRIMORE.

Of course, he might cash the check first, then make inquiries of the police; but Kay decided to chance that. Peekskill wasn't noted for his vast intellect, and she didn't think he would take any chances of invalidating the check. She made it out for a large amount and inclosed it in the letter.

Again she rang for the porter.

"When do we arrive in Philadelphia?" she inquired.

"'Bout five minutes, ma'am."

"I'm getting off there." Another bill went to keep the first company. "And please don't say anything to Mr. —to the gentleman next door."

He pocketed the bill. "Yassum. Not a word. Not a solitary word."

As Kay left the train she slipped the envelope under Peekskill's door. With a sense of huge excitement she watched the train pull out of the station. Peekskill and her three trunks were aboard. She laughed aloud, and the few half-asleep loiterers looked inquiringly at her.

She caught another train on a different line and reached New York at five o'clock. She sought a hotel where she wasn't known and registered under "Marie Larrimore."

"I want to be called at nine thirty, please," she told the clerk. "Will you attend to getting passage for me on the Furness boat for Bermuda? It sails at eleven, I think."

The man was a bit dubious. "Travel to Bermuda is pretty heavy right now," he said. "I don't know—"

"I must go!" Kay pounded her little doubled fists together. "I'll pay any amount. I must go!"

"I'll see what I can do." He looked sorry for her. Suddenly Kay realized that she was very tired. She felt as though if she didn't get to bed soon she would fall where she stood.

In the sanctuary of the hotel room she flung off her clothes recklessly and sank into bed. The mattress was so nice and soft; the sheets so cool— She sighed happily.

As she drifted off into dreamless sleep, she wondered where Peekskill had been going to take her on their wedding trip. He was keeping it a secret, and she hadn't been curious enough to ask.

"I WAS able to get a cabin for madame," said the clerk triumphantly. "It was the most expensive on the boat and had been ordered by some one, but canceled at the last moment. Will that be all right?"

"Perfectly!" Kay paid the sum asked and settled for her hotel bill. As she went toward the docks in a taxi which drove at such a breath-taking rate that she was almost dizzy, she pinched her arms to see if she were dreaming all this. She, Kay Larrimore—really Mrs. Peekskill Sylvester Barnes, Jr.—going on a trip all by herself! And what's more, going on a trip suggested by a totally strange young man. A young man who had kissed her almost on sight! How awful! Kay giggled happily.

And the first person she saw, as the ship pulled away from the dock, was the young man!

He was even nicer, seen by morning light. When Kay first glimpsed him, he was gazing rather anxiously about. His eyes caught sight of her; his face lighted in a smile. Quickly he came over. "I've been looking for you," he said. "I was afraid you'd missed the boat."

"You—you were very sure I would come!" Kay was a bit piqued.

"Of course." He nodded. "When people like us meet, it is meant that they should meet again. I was almost positive you would be here."

"But there might have been—circumstances," ventured Kay. "Circumstances to make my coming impossible."

"But there weren't!" he cried triumphantly. "Come." He took her

arm. "Let's go aft and see the last glimpse of New York."

"A last glimpse which will last several hours," said Kay mischievously. "Besides, I should be unpacking."

"Let that wait!"

They had deck chairs brought and placed side by side. When the gong rang for luncheon at one Kay was astounded. It didn't seem possible that they had been talking all that time.

"Let's have luncheon brought us here on deck!"

"That would be splendid, Mr.—" She stopped, and laughed. "Do you know, we've been talking all morning and I haven't an idea what your name is!"

"Terry. Barnes is the rest of it, if you're interested, but I'd a lot rather be called Terry."

"All right, Terry!" Kay summoned a smile to rather white lips. The name Barnes had startled her, but she recollected that he had said he was a distant relative of Peekskill's. What a dangerous game she was playing! She ought to tell him— Yet she didn't.

THE afternoon sped by on wings. By the dinner hour Kay felt as if she had known Terry always. She felt a heady sensation as though she had been drinking champagne.

"Our seats are at the first sitting at dinner," Terry said, handing her a card. "It isn't so fashionably late as the second sitting, but I was so late going down to sign that this was the best I could get. Do you mind?"

"Not in the slightest!" Kay was joyous.

She dressed hastily in one of her prettiest trousseau frocks. She didn't want to spend an extra moment away from Terry, but she must look her best.

She was rewarded for the trouble she had taken by the expression on his face.

"You look—simply gorgeous," he said. "Has any one ever told you how lovely you are—Marie?"

Kay blushed. "I'm glad you like me!" She almost whispered the words.

When they were seated at the table in the dining room, Terry began:

"You know it gave me rather a start, finding your name was Larrimore. Then I thought to myself, 'of course! She's one of the bride's relatives.' By the way, how did the wedding go off last night?"

Kay took a sip of water before she answered. "As—as well as could have been expected."

"Was the bride pretty?"

"Average." Kay was intent on her plate of salad.

"And how did Peekskill bear up?"

Kay took another sip of water. "He—he was all right," she answered.

"Well, he's an old hand at getting married, he wouldn't have been nervous."

Lucky that Terry was attacking his food with gusto, for Kay gave a start that nearly overturned her plate.

"What do you mean?" she asked in a low tone.

"Why, didn't you know? He'd been married a couple of times before. Pretty good for a chap about forty."

"Twice!" Kay repeated stupidly.

"This makes the third time."

"What — happened to the other ones?" Kay was staring at Terry as if she were hypnotized.

"The first one died and he was just recently divorced from the other. I think he got his divorce out in California. But let's not waste time talking about them. It's lots more interesting to talk about us! There's going

to be a moon to-night. A glorious one!"

"I—I don't seem to be very hungry," said Kay a few moments later. "I wonder if you'd mind if I went up on deck?"

"Of course not!" He got to his feet instantly. "I'll go with you."

"Oh, don't bother. Finish your dinner. And—"

He smiled. "Lady dear, I have one of the best appetites on record, but I'm telling you frankly, since I met you I've lost all desire to eat."

"Kay's laughter rippled out. "Have I as bad an effect as all that?"

"Worse!"

THEY had left the dining room and were ascending the companionway.

"Who are all the people on the landing?" asked Kay interestedly, viewing a group of people impatiently milling about.

Terry laughed. "They're the people who eat at second sitting," he said. "They've merely assembled in plenty of time, that's all. Probably lots of them are prominent bankers and brokers at home who sneer at food customarily, but let those same folks get on a boat and they're rarin' to go!"

Kay smiled.

Then her lips grew stiff. In the group was a man talking to a girl. His back looked awfully familiar— Like Peekskill's! She gave herself a mental shake. This wouldn't do at all. She must get that man out of her mind.

She and Terry went on up to the promenade deck, and in a moment she had recovered her composure. She leaned against the rail, watching the stars that seemed so close; looking down at the rippling water, dark and mysterious, with a clean white spray where the boat clove through the waves.

"I love this," she said contentedly.

"So do I!" He was near, so near that Kay fancied that she could hear the thundering of his heart. Or perhaps it was the excited beating of her own that she heard! Never before had she felt like this. She felt as though she were out in the majesty of a great storm, being swept about by the wind and the rain and glorying in it!

"I'm not going to stay up after that moon shines across the water!" said Terry abruptly.

"Why not?" She turned in surprise.

"I gave you my word that I would not make love to you. But I'm not going to be able to endure that moon." He pointed toward the little crescent. "My word isn't going to be worth a darn."

Kay clutched the rail tightly with fingers that trembled. "But—if I—absolve you from your promise?" she asked, her voice a mere whisper of sound.

"My dear!" She was held tightly in Terry's arms. His mouth was seeking hers. Again she felt the wonder of his kiss. "I love you so," whispered Terry.

"And I—love you," answered Kay, giving him back kiss for kiss. She wondered at herself. Was this the aloof, repressed Kay Larrimore she had always known? This girl who was shaken by mad surges of feeling? This girl—"

"Will you marry me, dear? I know I shouldn't ask. Not now. But, dear, we couldn't know more about each other than we do right now. Five minutes after I met you I was sure I wanted you for my wife. Oh, Marie, say you'll marry me!"

He was incoherent in his ardor. But his words brought a sense of chill to Kay. She shivered.

Instantly he was contrite.

"You're catching cold. I forgot you had only a thin frock. Here, take my coat." He had begun to take it off.

"No, no," said Kay wildly. "I—

"I'm afraid I'll lose him!" her mind answered in return.

In her cabin, she sat down and tried to think. What was she to do? She pressed her hands to her aching head.

A sharp knock came at the door.

She started nervously. "What is it?" she asked.

"I—I couldn't tell you. I was—afraid I'd lose you!"

I'll go below and get my wrap. I won't be gone a moment. Wait here for me."

BEFORE he could protest she had hurried away. Her heart was pounding like mad. She loved Terry, loved him with every breath she drew; yet she could not marry him. What could she say?

"Tell him the truth!" said her conscience inflexibly.

The door swung open. She scrambled to her feet and stood staring. "Peekskill!" she gasped. She drew her fingers across her eyes, wondering if she were the victim of an hallucination.

"The same, my dear!" Peekskill came in and closed the door. "And now will you kindly tell me what you mean by your extraordinary behavior? I glimpsed you when I was waiting to

go in for dinner. To make sure I hadn't been mistaken, I followed you to the deck. What I saw there was extraordinary, to say the least, in view of a certain ceremony which took place last night." His piggish eyes grew more porcine as he squinted them. He came over and took her arm roughly. "And I will not endure any blemish to the name of Peekskill Sylvester Barnes, either!"

"You forgot the junior part!" Kay flung at him. "And my actions are not your concern! I never wanted to marry you in the first place. I was pushed into the marriage by my aunt. And now that I've found out that you had two wives before me— Do you think I want to be a part of a circulating library?"

"It is not necessary to become vulgar, my dear Mrs. Barnes!" His grip on her arm almost made her cry out.

"You didn't tell me that you'd been married before."

"But I did. That's the joker, Kay dear. I did. Only you were too perturbed when we went to get the license to notice that small detail." He stared at her. Kay realized he had been drinking heavily. "By Jove, I never noticed before how pretty you are, Kay!"

Each time he used her name or an endearment it was like a blasphemy. She shrank back, but she was too late. He pinioned her in his arms and pushed his face against hers.

Without conscious volition Kay screamed.

Almost immediately the door burst open.

"Terry!" cried Kay with a sob of thankfulness.

Terry acted quickly. He gave Peekskill a neat uppercut that sent him sprawling on the floor, then grabbed Kay in his arms.

"Did the beast frighten you?" he asked tenderly. "I was worried when you didn't come back and thought I'd come down and knock to see if you were all right. It was when I reached the end of the alleyway that I heard you scream. Dear Kay!"

"Terry!" repeated Kay adoringly.

But Peekskill raised on one elbow. "Now if you will explain your extreme interest in *my wife,* Mr. Terry Barnes?" he said nastily.

Terry's breath caught sibilantly between his teeth.

"Your—wife!" he repeated slowly. "Your—"

He looked at Kay. Her face was very white.

"It's not true?" he begged hoarsely.

She couldn't say anything. Big tears forced their way down her cheeks. She let them go; in fact, was unaware that she wept.

Peekskill, noting the havoc his words had wrought, got to his feet.

"And now if you will go?" he suggested. "I have something that I must discuss with my wife. She will find—"

"YOU certainly have something to discuss with your wife!" broke in a new voice.

They all looked up in surprise. A tall blond girl was leaning against the door, smoking nonchalantly.

"Peek, old boy, I thought you said you weren't going to try any more of those tricks." She came over and linked her arm in his, then turned to Kay.

"I'm the last wife," she said calmly.

"Oh!" Kay swayed.

Terry put out a hand to steady her. He said nothing. His face was very grim.

"In fact, I'm not so last as I could be!" the newcomer chuckled. "Peek

and I were divorced out in California where you have to wait a year before remarrying. It lacks three months of that year being up.

"When I saw the notice of that wedding I came right along East—but I got in too late. The ceremony was over. I caught the train you were on, and I was an interested spectator to all the mix-up. I saw you"—she pointed to Kay—"duck out and get another drawing-room; then I saw you leave the train at Philadelphia."

"Why didn't you tell me?" squeaked Peekskill.

She shrugged. "Because I'm still a fool about you, I suppose! Well, I read Miss Kay's letter and took it in to Peekskill. We decided that there was no use wasting a perfectly good honeymoon, so we came along on these tickets, Bermuda-bound. I think that covers everything very nicely. Except that Peek had promised to be true to me, hereafter!"

Her voice was grim.

"And give you plenty of money!" put in Peekskill, peevishly.

"Both of which things you are going to do!" said the blond girl decidedly.

She addressed Kay:

"You won't kick if Peek keeps the money, will you? It 'll make us nice and comfortable, and I know we'll get along splendidly. All our quarrels were about money. Peek isn't much of a business man." She gazed at him fondly.

"Nor particularly a man of honor, either!" It was the first word Terry had spoken for quite awhile.

"I wouldn't say that! Peek never did pay any attention to practical things. He didn't realize he had to have his final decree before he married again. He thought his interlocutory was sufficient. You won't let it make any difference about keeping the money, will you?" she asked Kay.

Kay shook her head.

"Of course not," she said. The room was spinning about.

"And I'll have this marriage of yours annulled right away," went on Peekskill's wife composedly. "You do want an annulment, don't you?"

"Yes, yes!" Kay clasped her hands. "Oh, if I were only free!"

"Let's go up on deck!" said Terry stiffly.

"Well, so long!" The blond girl waved a cheerful hand. "You'll be free soon, and then you can get married." She smiled. "Glad everything turned out so well."

Kay made no reply.

ON deck the moon was shining gloriously, bathing everything in its magical light.

Kay said miserably: "Of course you despise me?"

"What I can't understand is, why did you go through with it last night, when you knew you didn't love him?" Terry's voice was hard.

"I couldn't let him down—in front of all those people. I didn't know what he was—then. I just thought—that it wasn't his fault—that I didn't care. So—"

She covered her face with her hands and sobbed miserably.

"But you ran away from him on the train?" Terry was thinking aloud.

"Before he even kissed me!" wailed Kay. "Not that I wanted him to!"

"Were you going to tell me, Kay?" Terry asked sternly.

She raised her tear-stained face to his.

"I—I don't know. You see, I loved you so—I was afraid I'd lose you. I

went to my cabin to—to think about it—and then—" She sobbed. "Everything happened. But what's the use of talking? It's over. The one romance of my life. And it's—all my fault."

She turned and began to run along the deck, away from that magic path of moonlight that seemingly mocked her woe.

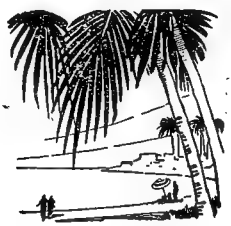
He darted after, overtook her, drew her close.

"*Our* romance isn't over!" he said with his lips against her hair. "It's only just begun, dearest. I love you so much. Do you think I'd let a—a misunderstanding like this stand between us?"

He tilted her head and laid his lips gently on hers, kissing away the salt of her tears.

Kay clung to him.

"Dear!" she whispered.



Because I Loved You Once

BECAUSE I loved you once, your voice has power
To move me still—not as it used to do,
But with an echo of the tone I knew,
To mind me of the sweetness of that hour.
Because your glance once thrilled me to the core,
I feel it now, whene'er it rests on me,
Reviving—howsoever fleetingly—
That dear delight that fills my heart no more!

Because your presence made this earth divine,
My consciousness awakens to it now,
And memory brings a sudden answering glow
At thought of all the joy that once was mine!
Love, being dead, is dead indeed, they say;
But, if it only *sleeps*, may it not wake some day?

—*Anna Nelson Reed.*

In the parlor old John Tivly had begun hinting again

Cupid Rides the Storm

Love, like a glorious beckoning rainbow, shines clear in the wake of the dread hurricane

By Ruth Mooney

"OH," gulped Merith, "I'd like to go upstairs and cry!"

She had been alone in the parlor with old John Tivly, and he had begun hinting.

"I can't ever get married," he had said. "My kids would make too much fuss. But if only I could, I'd like to marry you, honey."

Then he had tried to kiss her, of course. How did he get that way? If he couldn't get married why had he been stringing her along?

"What right's he got?" Merith de-

manded now of high Heaven. "What right's he got to take me out and act like he meant something when he knew that all the time? Can't ever get married! Where do I get off then?"

She was putting on her slicker and her oldest hat. The answer to her question came with depressing force as she opened the front door of the boarding house. She got off right here in this tiny town. Here where she was night operator at the telephone office. Here in Port Billings, where she was likely to stay night operator for a darned long time.

The wind caused the door to slam behind her. Startled by the noise, she made a grimace over her shoulder. Then she gathered her slicker about her and set forth.

"Geegolly, what a storm!" she exclaimed before she had gone a dozen feet.

It was blowing the breath out of her nostrils. The air was full of rain and sand. As she struggled along her inner heart uttered a petulant little cry: "Why can't something nice ever happen here?"

To the lights of Isabel Street, shining ahead but all blurred, she spoke fiercely. "You darn, pokey little town, I'm going to leave you! I'm going to leave the company, too. I'll get some other kind of a job."

For six months now she had been alone in Port Billings. Old man Tivly had come to her boarding house and had taken the seat next her at table. He was a contractor who made lots of money, and he had a nice car. He had begun by taking out parties and then he had taken her by herself. He had pretended to be just a harmless old man with a fatherly interest in her, but, of late, he had fallen into the habit of coming to the telephone office every night to make a long distance call while she was on duty. After each call he lingered in the office. Talking mostly about the Galveston flood, to be sure, but Merith could understand that. He had been in it, as a boy. The awful experience had affected him all his life.

Not enough to stop him hinting around. It took a lot to make a man do that.

Merith shuddered.

But wouldn't she be wise not to be so high hat? Wasn't she pretty nearly in the position of having to take old John Tivly on whatever terms he fixed? She could just about say that she must choose between him and working all her life. She might go on being a telephone operator and forget she was a woman or she might be a woman and forget everything else.

If it was Tommy Dill, there wouldn't be any hesitation! Tommy was wire chief. He was slim and young and so good-looking he made Merith's eyes hurt. A few kind words from him would mean a lot in her life, a whopping big lot. But why think of that? He had to do most of his work by daylight, so she hardly ever saw him. How could he grow interested?

There was not a bit of use in getting all bothered about Tommy. She could take John Tivly or else.

"And I came down here for Laura's sake," she remembered. "They said the climate would help her, but it didn't."

Under the lights of Isabel Street Merith was a tiny figure in a swirl of storm. She was compelled actually to fight to keep from being blown off her feet when she passed areaways or gaps between buildings.

"Geegolly!" she gasped, with a feeling of dismay. "This is worse than anything I ever saw. What makes

a storm like this? Why, it's been going on since noon." She paused in a doorway to catch her breath. "Poor old Laura. She was scared of it. She cried and cried for me to come with her. Then she died. Well—she was the lucky one. I transferred and took night work to be with her. And all I get for being a good friend is this!"

Away to the north was the city Merith called her home town. Did she want to go back? No use now. Her few relatives were not particularly agreeable and her friends would be scattered. Laura Murdock had been her best friend.

IN front of the newspaper office a bulletin was banging in the wind, smeared and almost illegible, even though Merith peered closely. She was surprised to find that local pride had been sacrificed to necessity—the word "hurricane" was announced in cold print. Around Port Billings that was almost profanity. The chamber of commerce always stoutly maintained that Port Billings didn't have hurricanes. Long ago, maybe, there had been a few, but in recent years the town had been visited only by "severe storms." This was the real thing. There was no particular danger, Merith knew, unless its center shifted to the west as it came in off the sea.

Merith glimpsed a clock through a store window and saw that it was nearly ten; time for her to relieve the evening operators. She tried to run, but had gone only a few feet before there was an explosive roar behind her.

The store window lay on the sidewalk in bushels of slivers.

"Geegolly!" Merith edged over to the curbing, as far from the buildings as possible. "Suppose it does shift to the west? Then what?"

In the telephone office the air was quiet. The two evening operators were waiting for her, wraps at hand.

"Good night, Merith," called May Long. "We got all the toll tickets counted. You can take it easy."

"Thanks, May. You'd better walk in the street. A window broke and the glass just missed me."

The girls bundled up and started out shoulder to shoulder, finding strength in companionship.

Merith bit her lip. "I wish I could have a friend again," she thought.

She put her slicker over a chair in the rest room. A few facetious bits of lettering in white ink caught her eye. "Bored of education," said one, and "Fragile—handle with care," said another. She had done that when she felt young and full of pep.

She was still young, but now she felt sad so much of the time. There was not much happiness in her life.

Merith had fine, tawny hair, and her cheeks were pink; her body was more nearly perfection than it had been when she bought the slicker. A few more years as night operator with scarcely a friend, scarcely any contact with young people, and she would begin to look like Laura, she thought. She hadn't meant to stay so long when she joined the telephone service. She had felt that it would be a good job for a few years, a job to do with until more thrilling things offered. She had expected life would turn out to be thrilling, somehow. But it hadn't. And now it seemed that life never would.

WITH headset adjusted, she patrolled the switchboard, falling into the measured gait she found most comfortable. The Port Billings board was a small one, only

twenty feet long, but it was better to keep moving, especially in the early part of the night. She could give quicker answers.

She thought of herself as a sentry, a little, tawny-haired sentry, posted in the dark and storm. If people got in trouble they would call through the night to her. They would depend upon her to find doctors, to dispatch rescuers.

She had been on duty half an hour now and already there had been calls for the ambulance, for the coast guardsmen.

A white bulb lit and she answered the signal. The voice of Tommy Dill, wire chief, came to her. Calm and steady, Tommy was. The storm did not seem to bother him. Her heart fluttered, try as she would to be calm. Perhaps he would—

"This is an extra circuit to the police chief's office, Merith. I fixed it so you can use it if the wind breaks his regular line. Give me a ring, will you?"

She made the test ring. Oh, why couldn't he once, just once, come out of his abstract interest in work and notice her? He wouldn't, of course. She was just a comrade to him, just one of the telephone people. He talked to all the operators as he talked to her, to linemen and superintendents, too. With that air of shy enthusiasm. And always with his black, sparkling eyes intent on equipment or some repair problem.

"O. K.," reported Tommy, after the test. "I'm coming in now. Any trouble calls for me?"

"Some poles blew down back of First Street."

"I cleared that. So long." Tommy's voice stopped and the lamps that he had caused to burn went dark.

Merith found the quiet of the operating room oppressive. It was weird to be in still air when the wind was making thundering noises and sand was beating on the south windows with the sound of fingers trying to fumble a way in.

She had to wipe tears from her eyes.

NOT a lamp on the board was glowing. Merith switched on the buzzer signal and went to the front window. Her tawny hair and pink cheeks were reflected dimly from the wet glass, but she did not heed them. Bending as far as possible to the left, she looked for the lights of the picture theater, but Isabel Street was dark, except for the beams cast by the headlights of an automobile. Had the city lighting circuits begun to fail? As if in answer to the question, the street lamps flashed up, dimmed, and went off again. She remained by the window, watching while a touring car passed in a smother of spray.

She would go to the picture theater on her next night off. Possibly one of the day girls would go with her and possibly some boys would take them to the Chocolate Shoppe afterward, for an hour or two of dancing. Tommy Dill had been at the Chocolate Shoppe last week. How iron hard his arms had been as he led her. And how disappointingly careful he had been not to let them hold too tightly!

Out of the corner of her eye she noticed a yellow spark. She was on her way to answer before the sound of the buzzer reached her.

A man's voice came, urgent yet cool.

"Hello, Miss Brook, get me the Red Cross office in Houston, will you? Is the line still working?"

"I can reach them. Do you want to talk to some particular person or just any one there?"

"Any one, Miss Brook. They're expecting to hear from me. I told them this afternoon that it looked like a real hurricane. By the way, we have established a rescue station in the courthouse. If anybody calls for help, tell them to go there or put them on the sheriff's telephone. We're fixing a hospital in the vacant store at Thrush and San Sebastian, too."

It really was going to be bad then. People were going to be hurt. Perhaps buildings would collapse. She must be brave and cool. But goodness, she wasn't brave! The noises of the storm frightened her even now. Oh, well, if the situation got too serious the chief operator would come to the office. Merith wouldn't care what happened if she had company.

"Thank you, hold the wire please."

The wind had taken a new note. Now it had the sound of violins and horns. But no violinist could give that hint of superhuman force, of world-wide forces unleashed. There was a drumming, or rather a throbbing under the singsong tones.

That was the Gulf!

THUMPING shattered the indoor quiet. She hastened to open the little wicket that gave to the public office. John Tivly, gleaming wet, thrust his head as far toward her as he could. His voice came huskily.

"Miss Brook? Where's Miss Brook? Isn't she here to-night?"

Merith recoiled.

"Yes, Mr. Tivly." She would be prim. "Did you want to call San Antonio?"

"No, no." He took off his spectacles and wiped the water from them, smiling vaguely in her direction. "Couldn't see a thing." Why did his voice tremble so? "Merith, honey, listen. I've got to leave. I came to—Merith, I've told you about the Galveston flood. It—it marked me. I was just a boy, but I saw them floating in the water. My father put me on a box and tried to cling to it too, but he had to let go—and—"

The elderly man sobbed.

"I'm scared. I can't help it—"

Then she was sorry for him.

"I wouldn't talk about it, John."

Zoom! The wind gave a bellow. Somewhere something crashed. Somewhere glass tinkled. Tivly cowered. He clung to the bars of the little wicket and his face turned white.

"This is one of them," he quavered. "They come in off the Gulf and wind blows and blows for hours, faster and faster. It carries the waters of the Gulf right up on the land and the houses collapse and the people— My father yelled to me, 'Stay on the box, Johnny, boy! Stay on the box! I'll be back in a minute.' And the waves—the waves pulled him away."

His terror was contagious.

Merith found one hand clutching her heart. Even so, she noted the blinking out of the lamp on the Houston call and darted over to clear the board. When she turned, Tivly's head was up again. He held out his hands to her through the wicket.

"Oh, girl, what a damned old coward I am. I have scared you. But I've got to go. You understand that, don't you? I swear to you, I'm not a coward about everything—just these storms. On account of Galveston, you see?"

"Surely, John. Why don't you go? I'd leave right now if I were you. Get in your big car and scoot."

"I want you with me," he begged. "I won't leave you here. Honey girl, I love you. Listen, the whole town is

likely to be wiped out by morning. The government man just told me. This will be another flood catastrophe, Merith! Come with me!"

"I can't leave the office," cried Merith, startled. She glanced toward the switchboard. She couldn't desert it. That was unheard of. "You see, John, times like this people need telephones."

But suppose the water of the Gulf was blown up over the land? Suppose it was coming now and soon would be battering and sucking at the walls of the building?

"CALL one of the other girls. Let her take your place."

"No—no," said Merith faintly.

"Listen!" Tivly spoke in a hoarse whisper. "Three days ago I saw the frigate birds and the gulls beginning to fly inland. They never do that for ordinary storms. Three days it's been coming over the Gulf. We're going to be in the center of it. Merith, honey, I don't give a hang about my family. We'll be married. I've got the car outside, all ready to go. Don't you see?"

She was dazed. She could only stare at him.

"That's just what I've always wanted to do for you since your friend died. Make a home for you, honey. I'll give you my money to spend. Come on while the north road is still open."

She couldn't quite believe. He was offering her a home, money, marriage!

"Hello, folks!"

A new voice provided an irritating interruption.

Tommy Dill stumped across the outer office and came through the switchboard room, his climbers clinking. The wind was blowing now until the very air of the room seemed to stir, but in Tommy's steady eyes there was no storm, no notice of the fury. He said easily:

"Hello, Tivly; hello, Merith. Say, you better call Mrs. Watkins; she'll want to be here, I guess. It's a real breeze this time."

"All right, Tommy."

Merith turned to the switchboard. Tommy went clinking back to his quarters and his testboard at the rear of the building.

Tivly called desperately.

"That's the ticket! You get Mrs. Watkins to come and take charge. I'll drive over after her. You be ready to leave when I come back."

He ran.

"All right," Merith answered, although she heard the door slam, "I'll go."

John loved her. If she married him she would have a car, an evening dress, all the pretty slippers she could use. She could live free of loneliness and ungainly switchboards forever. This was the best chance she would ever have. She would take it!

MRS. WATKINS was chief operator. Merith called her. The burr of the ringing machine came back unanswered for a long time. Merith scanned the lamp panels anxiously, but they remained dark.

John Tivly. She smiled. Of course she understood. He wasn't a coward. Nobody could cope with the unreasoning fear left by a horror such as the Galveston flood.

Why didn't Mrs. Watkins answer?

A girl's voice, tearful, came to her.

"Oh, is it you, Merith? Oh, Merith, Mrs. Watkins has been hurt! Josephine and I came over here an hour ago and we all started to the office, but the river was up and we couldn't get across.

She tried to go in a truck, but it upset and she's unconscious. And we can't get there, Merith! The water's all over the streets. It has divided the town in half. We're marooned over here."

"Oh," Merith said, "I wanted her to help. It looks bad."

"Merith, the only operator on your side of the river is May Long. See if you can call her. If you can't, it's up to you."

"All right."

Merith took down the connection and stared at the dark board in resentment.

"But I want to go!" she cried. "I want to go with John Tivly." She thrust out her chin fiercely. "I'm going to go with him."

THE town was waking. Calls were coming in all over the board and she had to do it alone. Well, she must be cool. That was the only way. One at a time.

"Oh, central, the water's come up suddenly and we can't leave the house. Send somebody; tell 'em we'll be on the porch roof."

Now, three were bright.

"Can you ask the ambulance to come out here? My husband's leg is broken. Hurry, please."

"Miss Brook, see if you can get the San Antonio *Eagle*. They'll want a column on this. The bridge is down."

"This is police headquarters. Say, Miss Brook, warn the people on Second and Third Streets to leave their houses. The waves have cleaned out the beach cottages already."

She could hear Tommy telling her that they might never make the courthouse and he wanted her to know he loved her

There was a great rattling. "Goodness, my headset is noisy," she thought.

Then she gasped. It was the wind. It made no recognizable sound, just a

series of stunning vibrations. And the Gulf water seemed to be outside the office window. It had crossed the long stretch of rolling sand hills, a mile or more and was pounding away near at hand. The water was coming up and into the town! It was going to wreck the buildings. As at Galveston, when John Tivly was a boy.

"Merith! Merith, honey!"

There was Tivly at the wicket, holding out his hands.

"Come!" he shrieked. "Come quick. The wind is carrying the tide up the river. It's blowing ninety miles an hour and getting stronger. The waves will wipe out everything." Eyes blazing, he waited for her answer.

"Merith! The north road will be under water in a few minutes. Come quick!"

Merith choked and took a step toward him. Then her eye fell on the switchboard, sparkling from end to end in mute appeal. She began to cry in a sort of self-pity. Turn away from them? How could any one turn away?

She stood for a moment, trembling. She felt cold. Then she set her teeth and darted at them. They blazed like jewels, live jewels, red, yellow and green. She must get them all.

"Merith?"

She shook her head, refusing to look into his terrified eyes. When, after a long while, she glanced at the little wicket, she found it empty. Tivly was gone.

She must stay now till the last minute. She was going to be killed, probably. Well—she wouldn't be the first. Other girls had faced it. Others had stayed at their switchboards until—

"Tell everybody," said the chief of police, "everybody on this side of the river to get up on Middleton Hill. The water is sure to go over the whole town. And listen, Miss Brook, don't stay there at the office too long. You'll be flooded out. Just do what you can and come on over here."

Warn everybody? Oh, she couldn't! One girl couldn't ring them all and give service, too. And the lamps were calling, silently calling.

A HAND touched her shoulder. She looked into Tommy Dill's face. It was stolid under its tan, like a piece of leather. In his eyes was a look of calculation, as if he was working a problem in arithmetic.

"No use trying those San Saba circuits," he said. "They're all open."

Ah, but it was a comfort to have Tommy there. He was so quiet. With Tommy she wouldn't die alone. That was something. To live so much alone and to die alone too would be hard. But Tommy wouldn't let that happen. Tommy was made of muscles like iron. If there was one thing everybody knew about Tommy it was that he would stand by when needed.

He went back to his testboard with long, swift strides.

"The power plant is going to fail any minute," he called to her. "Don't let it worry you. I've got the gas engine working, and the reserve batteries are all O. K."

As Merith nodded, she became conscious of some one walking toward her. It was May Long, the only operator on her side of town.

"Terrible time getting back here," said May, tossing aside a soaked hat and slicker. "What shall I do?"

"Warn everybody to go up on Middleton Hill," cried Merith. "The chief thinks every other place will be flooded. Oh, you darling, to come here in all this."

"I knew the board would be overloaded," said May briefly.

The city light plant failed within a quarter of an hour, but that only caused a blink at the office. Tommy switched on the extra batteries, started the emergency power engine, and the room was as well lighted and the board as much aglow as ever. Back and forth, in and out, the two girls plied. The little jewels blazed and blazed again. Occasionally a few words would come into Merith's headset from Tommy Dill.

"That line's done, Merith," or "There's no circuit here." Sometimes he would make her smile by reeling off a gibberish of toll codes: "NC, operator, AG 2 P. M. next Thursday."

Then a change became noticeable. The warnings were having an effect. The attack of the storm was telling. People were abandoning their homes and their telephones and striking out for safety. Redoubled energy now. The worst of the work was over.

A hundred lamps became bright at once. Merith gave a cry of dismay. Again Tommy laid a hand on her shoulder.

"Permanents," he said. "The Third Street cable has broken. Come on back here. I've made some coffee."

"Give it to May. She got all wet."

"She's had some."

Tommy took her into the wire chief's room. There, upon a blow torch, a tin pot was steaming gayly. Merith drank gratefully. She felt numb. It was an effort to move her feet. She was conscious, though, of Tommy.

MERITH returned to the operating room. She found an inert board, with only three or four lamps blinking, except where the broken cable left its permanent glare.

"I've called everybody that will answer," said May Long.

"You'd better scoot up Middleton Hill then," said Merith. "I can handle it now."

"No, you go."

"May! I'm night operator and I tell you—"

Tommy coughed. Merith found him looking at her with a curious, tight little smile around his lips.

"All right," he said, "I'll take her to the courthouse and then come back for you. We'll stick till the board goes out."

Alone again. Just one call up now. The newspaper editor was talking to San Antonio from the courthouse. The voice of the Gulf had become terrific, like men shouting, an army of them. Over that was the wind, vibrating painfully. The air smelled of salt.

The San Antonio light went out. The editor's began to wink. Merith cut in on the circuit and heard the howl of a broken wire.

"The line's down, Mr. Jones. I don't think we can get 'em again tonight."

She released the cords and sat down, staring at the switchboard. It went black. The ceiling light dimmed, blinked and went out. The gasoline engine in the basement gave two or three sputtering coughs and died. Water! The battery room and the engine room were flooded. She rose, feeling terribly weak and tried to feel her way through the dark.

"I guess I'd better get my hat," she thought. "I—"

THERE was a great crash. A window was driven in. Shrinking, Merith looked into the dim gray void and saw a hoary-crested gigantic wave hurl itself at the building!

She screamed involuntarily.

"Tommy! Tommy!"

"Here I am," answered the steady voice. "Here! Where are you? I've lost my flash light."

He touched her. She threw herself into his arms with a sob. She felt his hard muscles lifting. She was held fiercely in the crook of one elbow, but the pain was a comfort.

Darkness overwhelmed her. She was barely conscious of stinging particles of water lashing her face, of gasping for breath as the rush of air seemed to suck her lungs empty. She felt water clutching at her. Occasionally, she and Tommy crashed into heavy objects.

Now, they were going faster and something pleasant was happening to her cheek. Tommy was doing it.

He was kissing her, murmuring hysterically. He loved her. He wanted her to know it, whatever happened this night.

They might never make the courthouse, and she must know.

She couldn't answer. The darkness had gripped her, and her tongue wouldn't work. But she hoped they would get to the courthouse.

Because she knew that she wanted these hard muscles to clasp her again.

SOME one was talking.

"I'm going to leave the service. I've got to get somewhere where there's some life. I'm going with John Tivly. I'm tired of it. I hate it. I—"

Merith recognized her own voice going on and on hysterically.

She opened her eyes.

She was in a big room, crowded with people. They sat and stood everywhere, desolate, worn out, bowed down. Outside, the wind was still roaring, but it was daylight and the noise was not so sinister, somehow.

Tommy was sitting beside her. She was on a cot and he was on the edge of it. He answered her. He didn't know she had been out of her head.

"Oh, I wouldn't, Merith. I wouldn't leave the service. I don't know. It has its tough times, but there's something I like about the service. People need it, you know. They're awfully glad to have us there at the telephone office when they need us."

"I didn't mean it, Tommy," she said. "Why, I—I don't remember what I was saying. It was—I fainted."

"And besides," said Tommy, in the most ridiculous, matter of fact way, "I love you. I want you to stay here."

"Oh!"

"I want to talk to you about it, but how can I if you don't stay here?"

"Oh, Tommy—oh, I see. I'd better stay then." She caught her breath.

"For a little while," she qualified, making a belated clutch at dignity.

But it was of no use, for the iron muscles had her tight, and Tommy was kissing her. Right before every one.

But Merith did not care! She kissed him back.

The new make-up did wonders for Anne

Saturday Night and No Date

It all began when a Follies girl visited the quiet town of Lakedale

By Dorothy Dayton

ANNE DOHERTY peered moodily out of the window of her crisp little yellow and green bedroom, down tree-shaded Walnut Street, stirring faintly in an early evening breeze.

"I simply can't bear this town another day," she repeated over and over to herself. "I simply can't stand it."

It had all begun at the dinner table, when Anne's mother had inquired, "Well, I suppose George is coming to-night?" and Anne had replied, with an indifference she was far from feeling, "No, I'm not going out to-night, mother. I've got a headache; I'm going to stay home."

Mrs. Doherty raised her eyebrows. "Well, you and George seemed so

thick only a few weeks ago, I can't understand what's happened. I thought you were seeing too much of him. Men grow indifferent that way—if there isn't any competition. You haven't had a date all week, Anne."

Mrs. Doherty's words were well meaning enough, but she didn't realize that if there's one thing a girl can't stand, it's for her own mother to assume that she's a failure with men.

To Anne's ears, already aching from that strained listening for the telephone to ring, her words were both an accusation and a taunt. For a moment Anne felt almost as though she hated her mother, particularly when the latter continued:

"I can't understand you. I know that George was interested in you. And you shouldn't have let him slip through your fingers. After all, he's a man any girl might be glad to get, and you know you're getting older every day. If you'd confide in your mother, I might teach you something about managing men—something modern girls don't seem to know."

That was the last straw. Anne fled from the room, feeling too choked up to answer. All Lakedale no doubt was discussing her affairs in much the same way, and feeling sorry for her. Oh, it was unbearable!

So Anne thought, as she stood at the window in the cool twilight that Saturday evening, one ear still straining in the general direction of the telephone. For in Lakedale, if a girl wasn't seen out on Saturday night with a boy friend—preferably at Spring Lake dance pavilion on the shores of Lake Michigan—her social star was waning. She could not be counted a popular girl, and if a girl wasn't popular in Lakedale she might as well be dead.

In a moment her worst fears were realized. Sure enough, George Barthell's low-slung blue roadster whizzed up the street, and stopped in front of Daisy Revel's house. She caught a glimpse, through the yellow curtains, of his curly dark hair and light summer suit, as he jumped out, ran eagerly up the steps and into the room, Anne knew, where Marilyn Holland was waiting for him.

He didn't as much as glance in the direction of the rambling white Doherty house, which, until a few weeks ago, had been the almost nightly destination of that same adorable blue roadster.

Anne could bear no more, and flung herself face downward on the bed, sobbing into the pillow. Saturday night and no date! She had never felt so bleak and lonely in all her life.

Daisy Revel had not been a real friend to Anne at any time, although they belonged to the same crowd. Daisy wasn't particularly attractive, and she herself had been interested in George when he first began devoting himself to Anne, nearly a year ago.

But this summer Marilyn Holland had come from New York to spend her vacation as Daisy's guest—a vacation which apparently was being lengthened. At the very first party for Marilyn it happened. George, like every other eligible young man in Lakedale, was immediately fascinated. Marilyn seemed to prefer him above all the others, and gradually he had ceased his attentions to Anne, which had been so marked that most of her friends supposed they were engaged.

Marilyn had everything in her favor, Anne reflected bitterly. In the first place, she was a stranger. There weren't many new girls in Lakedale, and then only in summer. Besides, she

was a former Follies beauty; that alone was an advertisement which attracted men like flies to molasses. And she had style, sophistication, allure, poise — well, the Lakedale girls were simply outclassed.

At the moment Anne hated her as she never had hated any one in her life —hated her, and Daisy Revel, and George, and yes, even her own mother.

ANNE, sitting on the side porch the following afternoon, trying vainly to get her mind on a book, and wishing desperately that her best girl friend, Grace Jordan, hadn't gone away for the summer so she'd have somebody really to confide in, was more than surprised when through the front gate came swinging the tall, lithe figure of Marilyn Holland, bright blond hair shining like an aureole.

She walked with a brisk air, head held high. Something in her very carriage suggested that she knew herself to be attractive and desirable. Snappy shoes, smart sports clothes, the newest costume jewelry, pert hat — you couldn't help looking at her.

"Hello!" she called brightly. "Just felt I needed a change of scene. Can I come up and sit?"

Anne was attracted in spite of herself. No doubt of it, Marilyn had magnetism.

"Sure thing," she replied, with an effort at lightness. "I was just wishing somebody would come along."

They chatted, first of this and that— inconsequential things. Then—

"You weren't out at the lake last night. I missed you."

"No," said Anne, "I had a headache."

Marilyn looked at her quizzically, whereupon Anne flushed.

"Listen," said Marilyn, "I just got on to something. I'm afraid I've been cutting in on your preserves."

Anne felt herself stiffening. After all, she wasn't going to be pitied by any girl from New York.

"You're welcome to George Barthell. And if you think I'd take him back now—you can afford to be generous, because you're returning to all the excitement of New York."

"Tommyrot! New York means hard work and dirt and noise, and heat in the summer time. And living in one room, or half a room, instead of six."

"I've always wanted to go to New York!" sighed Anne. "I hate this town. And you're the first New Yorker I've ever really known. Honestly—oh, there's something so dashing about everybody that comes from New York. I don't blame George for liking you."

Marilyn laughed merrily, then her face sobered.

"You're a sweet thing, Anne," she said very seriously. "And darned good-looking—although you could do better for yourself than you do in the way of clothes and make-up. But men are funny. They can't see beneath the surface. I suppose my having been a Follies girl did rather intrigue the men here. It usually does. But sometimes it doesn't make things any too pleasant for us. They like to be seen with us, but it doesn't mean anything. I wouldn't believe any man on a stack of Bibles this high," indicating with both hands.

"No," said Anne dryly. "I'm afraid they're not very constant. Especially when a new girl comes along. And there are never any new men in a town like this."

"Yes, I know all about it. I'm a small town girl myself—from Cranton, Illinois, in fact. That's a real hick town. The reason I left was be-

cause a girl from Chicago beat my time with a fellow I was engaged to. I've never quite got over that, I guess."

ANNE found, to her surprise, that she was actually liking Marilyn Holland. The New Yorker seemed so genuine that Anne felt one could be frank with her—a rare thing between girls.

"Well, I don't mind admitting it," Anne said. "I was rather keen about George, and he certainly was the most eligible man I've ever had a chance for. But he never proposed to me, although everybody seemed to think we were engaged. We just went around together so much it got to be a habit. Mother says there's a technique about making a man propose, but if there is, I haven't learned it. He just sort of took me for granted, I guess."

"Fatal mistake," was Marilyn's comment. "Men prefer the new and strange—girls who are hard to please, and who give them a shock once in a while. The trouble about you, Anne, is that you're too self-conscious with men. You haven't enough faith in your own attractiveness. Believe you're a siren, and everybody else will think so, too. And a man usually has to be jolted into proposing. Do something startling."

Anne sat forward in her chair. They talked ways and means, in which Marilyn seemed the sum total of worldly knowledge. It was nearly twilight when they parted.

"To-morrow, before I leave, I'll come over and give you a lesson in make-up. You have to learn how to flaunt your best points. And when I get back to New York I'll buy you some frocks at my model shop on Fifty-sixth Street that will make them sit up and take notice. And we'll scheme something else — I'll think of something."

"I don't know why you should take so much trouble," Anne said gratefully.

"Well, I like you, and I've been through it all myself, but outside of that I'll tell you something else. Daisy deliberately planned to get even with you. She couldn't get George herself, so she deliberately invited me out. She's admitted it. When I leave she'll try to get him herself. She's already getting in some good licks. And I suppose it's not very polite in me—but Daisy is a cat. I hate catty girls."

Marilyn was as good as her word. When she had finished with Anne next day the new rouge, lip stick, and deftly used eye-shadow did make her dark eyes look twice as large and sparkling as they ever had seemed before.

"And now here's my scheme. It may sound wild eyed, but I'm going to send a summer boarder out from New York that will knock them all for a row. An old pal of mine—needs a place like this for his health. I'll warn you, he's frightfully attractive. I'll put a bug in his ear—and make your Georgie jealous. I'd give an eye to see Daisy dangle for him," the girl chuckled in amusement.

"Tell me honestly," said Anne. "Do you care anything about George? Really and truly, I mean."

"Lord, no!" Marilyn replied quickly. "Even if I did, I'd have better sense than to take it seriously. I've passed the day when I could be content to become a leading matron in a small town. There's only one man in the world I have any faith in—and that's Charlie Beggs, the fellow who's coming to make your Georgie jealous!"

"Oh!" gasped Anne. What a strange girl this Marilyn was after all.

"I can't understand why you'd do such a thing."

ANNE scarcely knew whether to expect Mr. Beggs or not. Only a girl like Marilyn would think of a daring scheme like that. Undoubtedly, thought Anne, Marilyn didn't really regard her as serious competition, or she wouldn't risk the chance of losing the only man she could trust.

Nevertheless, the New York girl was as good as her word once more. In a week, during which George Barthell had not called her once, but had had one date with Daisy Revel, Anne received a telegram saying that Charles Beggs was arriving on the five ten Monday afternoon. Would Anne meet him?

Anne did—with the family touring car, wearing her very prettiest blue sports dress, her hair done in the manner that Marilyn had taught her, softly waved, sleekly parted in the middle, and twisted into a bun at the nape of her neck. It was amazingly becoming, and rather distinguished, Anne thought, especially with the new make-up.

Charlie proved to be all that Marilyn had said for him. He was tall, rather blond, with nice blue eyes, and a charming smile. Anne liked the nonchalant air with which he wore his exceedingly well-cut clothes.

Moreover, she was proud of the fact that he carried a cane and wore gloves. When Lakedale young men carried canes they looked self-conscious about it, and they rarely wore gloves except for warmth.

"Well, this *is* a surprise!" he said cheerfully. "Marilyn told me a charming girl would meet me, but I didn't expect any one like you."

Anne drove him to Mrs. Brown's boarding house, two blocks down the street from her own home. Then, because he was so irresistibly friendly and charming, and she already felt that she had known him for a long time, she impulsively invited him home for dinner. There would be fried chicken, waffles and homemade ice cream, she knew.

As they passed Daisy's house, Daisy, from the front porch, stared in astonishment. Anne waved gayly. A new man in Lakedale, particularly one so attractive as Mr. Beggs, was quite an event. She knew the news would be telephoned to all the crowd before dinner time.

Anne had given her mother no intimation of the stranger's coming. But she carried her head proudly as she entered, and there was a triumphant note in her voice when she introduced Mr. Charlie Beggs of New York.

Mr. Beggs was very polite and attentive to Anne's father and mother, who thought him charming. But Mrs. Doherty could scarcely restrain her curiosity, and paced impatiently in her room while she waited for the two young people in the sitting room to finish what sounded to her like a very strange performance indeed.

They were playing the phonograph's maddest jazz tunes, in addition to some new, strange music which Anne's mother had never heard before. Then came queer sounds that fairly rattled the windows.

Mrs. Doherty wondered if her rather quiet daughter had suddenly taken leave of her senses. It was after twelve when she heard the girl shouting a cheery farewell over the front gate, and the man's reply: "See you to-morrow, and we'll go over it all again."

Anne came tiptoeing in — her eyes starry, her face flushed, and over one arm were flung great clouds of filmy black tulle. In the other hand she carried slippers of a bright cherry red, with very high heels.

"But why in the world—you nearly broke my heart!" Anne said

"Anne!" exclaimed her mother. "What does this mean? And who is he?"

"Oh, just a friend of Marilyn's from New York. I used my last month's allowance for the dresses. You don't mind, do you?" she said coaxingly. "Marilyn sent them on from New York."

"What does he do? Is he well off?" For every man, in the maternal eyes, was important only in the rôle of future bridegroom.

"I don't know, and I don't care. Do you want to help me try them on, mother?"

Mrs. Doherty did, and when they had finished she was almost as excited as Anne.

"Why, you're beautiful — beautiful!"

Anne gave her mother a quick, appreciative kiss. "You *are* a peach, mother," she said impulsively. "I'm sorry I seem so mean and short sometimes. But I do wish you wouldn't try so hard to get me married."

SATURDAY came, and Anne hurried through her dinner, so eager was she to dress. With Mr. Beggs, she arrived at Spring Lake dance pavilion rather late, as she had planned. For in the long tulle dress, with its swaying skirt, its slender waist, and its touch of cherry red, Anne knew that for once she couldn't help being seen —and noticed.

She danced with a new self-confidence. One of her sorrows had been that she always felt too self-conscious when dancing to really enjoy herself. But this was dancing as she so often had dreamed of dancing.

Charlie Beggs was a marvelous dancer—not like George, who, whenever he begged her pardon for scuffing the toe of her slipper, always rather intimated by the tone of his voice that Anne's dancing wasn't all it might be.

Marilyn had been right. It was all a matter of self-confidence, and feeling—oh, alluring and desirable, as she felt to-night.

"And now, Feather," she heard Charlie's deep voice saying, "don't you think it's about time for us to cut our wide swath?"

Feather! Anne looked up into Charlie Beggs's blue eyes, her own shining with delight, her whole face illuminated as though from an inner light. It was the nicest thing, she thought, that any man ever had called her. She who so often had felt clumsy while dancing with Lakedale boys.

Charlie, with that poise which made him seem so sophisticated and attractive, whispered to the orchestra leader, and slipped him a bill.

The orchestra struck up a South American tango. This seemed to paralyze the expectant dancers. They were not accustomed to the tango, and only a half dozen couples continued, half-heartedly, after the first few bars.

Charlie and Anne had the floor almost to themselves. They whirled and dipped; she could feel the long tulle skirt twirling and floating about her, just as she had seen them on the stage. It was pure poetry of motion — and when it was over she was amazed to find that the whole crowd was lined against the walls, clapping madly. They called for an encore. And then Charlie and Anne did the famous Harlem clog dance.

In the din that followed, with everybody pressing about them, and Anne gayly introducing Charlie to the rest of the crowd, she heard Daisy Revel's remark: "Well, if a girl wants to make a spectacle of herself! But where in the world did Anne learn that? And who is her escort?"

Daisy was with George, but for once it seemed to make no difference to Anne, who sensed she could easily get him back again any time she wanted him.

Anne could fairly feel the flutter Charlie started among the girls. Even the boys liked him, he was so friendly and amusing. It was, she decided, the very happiest evening of her entire life! Saturday night, and a wonderful date!

During the weeks that followed Anne was like a butterfly newly emerged from its drab cocoon, pluming brilliant wings. Attention, gayety, and the feeling that she was liked and admired, brought out a finer quality in her. She held her head higher; she walked with a snappier step. Her mother said she had mysteriously developed "style." Her new spirit of gayety fairly overflowed and was felt by all who came in contact with her.

Mornings Charlie and Anne went swimming and rowing together. He was an ideal companion. And on moonlit evenings, where there wasn't a dance or party, they drove around in the Doherty car, sometimes with mother and father in the back seat. Charlie always acted as though he were glad to have them along—something other Lakedale boys wouldn't have thought of.

The telephone rang often now, and Anne flitted about gayly, humming to herself as she pressed her frocks or helped her mother with little tasks about the house. It pleased her that every time George called she really did have another date, usually with Charlie, but now and then with other young men who had noticed, for the first time, that Anne Doherty was a very attractive and popular girl.

She would give George a lesson, she decided, but in the meantime Charlie was the most delightful companion a girl ever had. Occasionally he made a date with another girl in the crowd, but only if Anne herself were dated. Usually, when Anne was not free, he stayed at home to write. He was working on a play he told her.

Then a remark of her mother's ab-

ruptly thrust the girl from her dream world and made her feel vaguely troubled.

"Anne, don't you think you're acting rather foolish? If this Charlie doesn't mean anything serious you'll be very lonely when he leaves. I think you might encourage George."

"After the way he treated me? Well, I guess not."

But it was true. After Charlie left she would no doubt be lonely again. There were plenty more Saturday nights in the future for which dates would be needed. Maybe her mother was right — she didn't know how to manage men.

THE next time George called she unexpectedly gave him a date. They drove about in the little blue roadster, just as they had last spring. Somehow, George was different. Heavy and dull, after Charlie, she thought. But then, she never had felt gay with George.

"Who is this Charlie Beggs, anyway?" he asked, stopping the car. "Sort of a dancing gigilo?"

Anne flew to his defense.

"Nothing of the kind," she said hotly. "He's one of the nicest men I've ever known. And he has brains, too. He's writing a play."

"Oh, one of those fellows!" George replied contemptuously. He himself was in the real estate business. "He'll never get anywhere. It's money that counts these days. By the way"—his tone changed—"I certainly put over a big deal the other day. Made ten thousand dollars on that Maitland house deal."

Anne knew she was expected to compliment him on his ability. Instead, she answered carelessly: "That's good —but money isn't everything."

"I want you to promise me something," George said abruptly. "I want you to quit running around with this fellow. Nobody knows anything about him, and people are beginning to talk."

"George!" Anne exploded, her temper rising. "What right have you to say that? When Marilyn put on her exhibition dances you didn't think anything about what people said, did you? You liked her because she attracted attention, didn't you?"

"That's different," George said. "She was a show girl, and that's what people expected."

"Well, you're not very consistent. All the time Marilyn was here you didn't pay any attention to me, did you? And did I ever ask you not to date anybody else?"

"Well, naturally," said George, "a man likes to go around with a girl that all the other fellows are after. But that doesn't mean that he's serious about her. That's not the kind of woman a man wants to marry."

"No, he wants a woman who'll always stay at home doing the housekeeping and looking after the children, but he himself can have a gay time if he wants to, I suppose," Anne retorted bitterly. "Well, we modern girls aren't putting up with things like that. What's sauce for the goose, you know."

"It's different after you're married," George expostulated. It was the one trait she couldn't endure in him—that possessiveness, that selfish desire to dominate rather than share.

"Well, you and I aren't married. We aren't even engaged," Anne said very quietly, for she was determined to get at the bottom of the curious way men think. "You certainly knew me a long time, and I quit going around with all the other fellows until you felt sure of me. Then Marilyn comes

along, very glamorous and dazzling, and you neglect me for a whole month, practically. Now you seem to want me again. Is it because Marilyn is gone, or because somebody is paying me a lot of attention?"

"Because," said George, "you're the kind of girl, or were until lately, that I've always thought I'd be proud of for a wife. I want somebody who'll give a hundred per cent return for a home and clothes and good money."

"Well, if that's a proposal at last," said Anne coldly, "no thank you."

GEORGE looked at her in astonishment. Anne giggled in spite of herself. That any girl in Lakedale could turn down George Barthell, successful real estate man, apparently was too much for his comprehension.

Furious, he threw in the clutch and started the car. They didn't speak all the way home.

"Home so early?" Mrs. Doherty asked in astonishment after George had gone. "Why, what is wrong?"

"Well, if you must know," Anne said pertly, "I've just turned down Mr. George Barthell, successful real estate man, who made ten thousand dollars on the Maitland house deal the other day, tra la, tra la, tra la."

"Anne, you haven't!" her mother cried. "Why, you'll never have such a chance again!"

"I hope not," was the reply. "And what's more, I'm not going to marry any man, ever. I'm going to New York and have a career like Marilyn."

This, naturally, precipitated a family storm. Mrs. Doherty cried a little, and by the time Anne got to bed some of her elation had left her.

Next evening she and Charlie went for a long walk along the lake front.

"Well, Feather," he asked, "how's everything coming?"

"Why is it," she responded, "that when you want anything, you only want it until you can get it. Then you find it isn't what you wanted at all. Two months ago I'd have been thrilled to death if George had proposed to me. Now—well, it's just caused a family row. Listen, Charlie, I want to live in New York and go on the stage."

"I wouldn't if I were you," he replied. "It's a hard, tough proposition, and it takes the—oh, the fineness and loveliness off a girl. At least, many of them. And it's full of heartbreaks and disillusionment."

The girl was silent for a moment. It was Charlie who broke the silence.

"By the way, Anne, I have to leave to-morrow."

"No, not really!" Her voice was almost a whisper. Of course, she had known he wouldn't stay long—but to-morrow! The news left her strangely empty and desolate.

"I'll miss you terribly," she finally said. "You've been a wonderful pal, Charlie, and that's something it's hard to find in a man."

"Or in a girl," he added, taking her hand.

For a long time they walked without speaking. Anne's heart seemed to be fluttering in her throat. She looked at Charlie—his tall, lean, strong figure, the way he carried his head, chin thrust forward.

His dear blond hair, blowing in the wind. How she'd love to run her fingers through it.

And his blue eyes. She remembered the way they crinkled at the corners when he smiled. But now they were looking straight ahead, and very serious.

Life without him would be unutter-

ably dull—like bread without salt, she thought. She had been so gay, so proud of all the attention she had been receiving, so determined to get even with George, that she hadn't realized until now that her feeling for Charlie was anything more than a lovely friendship.

She had been proud, too, that she could be such an understanding and platonic friend to a man who had a sweetheart back home in New York. Marilyn, of course. That was the way girls should be, she had thought. But friendship, she now realized, was the only certain path to love.

Oh, oh, the wounded vanity she had felt over George was nothing like this poignant aching she experienced now. This, then, was love! She had never before realized what it was like.

Charlie was speaking. "So you really didn't care for George after all?"

"No."

Happiness illuminated his face.

"Oh, Anne, Anne, I adore you! I think I have loved you from the first moment, but I thought of you all the time as George's girl, and I was terribly jealous, I'm afraid."

Anne's heart gave a mad leap of joy—until Charlie said:

"I wish I could take you back with me. But that, of course, is impossible. I wish I could ask you to marry me, but I can't. Why, Marilyn even loaned me the money to come here on a vacation, when I was absolutely broke."

Marilyn, always Marilyn! That girl got all the breaks. But Anne had to admit she was a decent sort, and probably deserved it.

"Yes, Marilyn is wonderful," Anne agreed aloud, with a sob in her voice. "But we're good friends, Charlie. Just pals. And we'll just shake hands and say good-by"—she paused for self-control—"and always remember this as a very pleasant summer."

To say that, in loyalty to Marilyn, gave her a sense of dignity—an inner exaltation, which, while it didn't still the heartache, nevertheless made her feel better.

Anne lay awake most of the night, thinking. Had Charlie really meant that he loved her, but out of loyalty to Marilyn he couldn't marry her? Was it right for him to marry Marilyn, whom he didn't really love?

It was a complicated problem, and then it struck her that perhaps Charlie, who met so many beautiful girls in New York, probably hadn't meant it very seriously after all. Men fell in love with pretty girls easily, but unless they actually proposed, it didn't mean much. Thus reasoning, she fell into a tearful and disturbed sleep, dreading the morrow, which would be—*Saturday night and no date!*

NEXT morning, early, while she was helping with the breakfast dishes, Charlie unceremoniously dashed into the kitchen, waving a yellow slip.

"Anne, hurry to the station. Marilyn's coming on the ten thirty, and she says she has exciting news."

With a heavy heart Anne climbed upstairs and slipped into a sports dress. It hurt her terribly that Charlie could feel joyous over Marilyn's coming. What a fickle creature he was after all!

Marilyn, the girl who possessed everything Anne ever had wanted, stepped from the train, looking even prettier than before. She threw her arms around Charlie and gave him an affectionate kiss. Anne, seeing it, bit her fingers to stifle a sob.

"Guess what mamma brought?"

cried Marilyn. "You couldn't guess in a thousand years!"

"What?" asked Charlie. "I'll bite."

"Your play's going to be produced —by Henry Fellowes—this fall—and you know what that means—five thousand dollars in advance, besides the royalties."

"Whoopee! Did you hear that, Anne?" Charlie asked, taking her by the arm and forcing her to look into his eyes.

"Why, bless you, you're crying! If that isn't like a girl—crying when she ought to be laughing. Or maybe you don't care, Anne. But I'll make you care, Anne. You'll marry me yet."

"Are you crazy, or am I, or is everybody?" Anne demanded, with a look of such bewilderment that Charlie couldn't resist kissing her tear-stained cheek, right on the station platform.

"But Marilyn—I thought you were engaged to her?"

It was Charlie's turn to look astonished.

"Why, Marilyn's my sister, you silly goose!"

It took Anne a few moments thoroughly to take this in. "Last night—you said—"

"I said I couldn't marry you because I didn't have a cent in the world, and didn't know whether I'd ever be a success or not."

"That was no good reason," said Anne.

"What's all this about?" Marilyn asked. "Oh, I made him promise not to tell you he was my brother."

"But why in the world?" Anne asked. "You nearly broke my heart."

"I'm a wicked little schemer, I guess," Marilyn laughed. "I wanted to bring your George back to you. Charlie's a good scout, and he fell in with the plot, the idea being that it would be perfectly safe for you to pal around with an ineligible bachelor. If George knew I had sent my brother here he'd think it was a put-up game, and so would you. But everything worked out differently. As a matchmaker I'm a total flop."

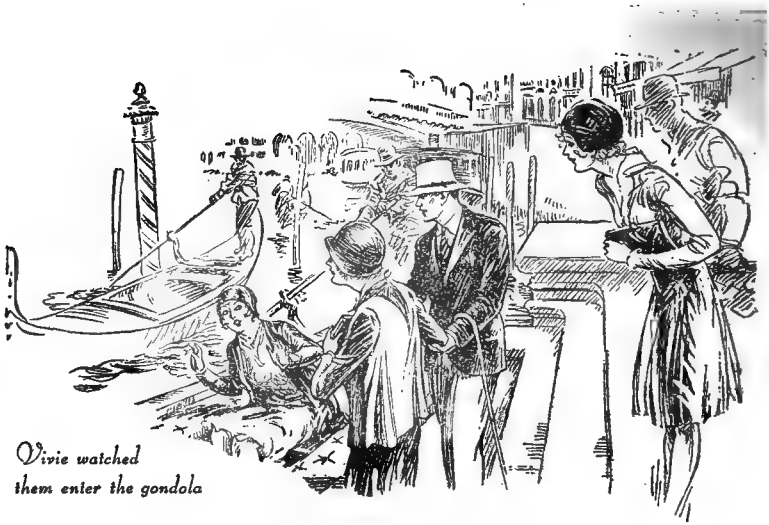
"You're the best matchmaker in the world!" Charlie exclaimed.

What Anne was about to say will never be known, for a pair of strong arms were folded around her waist and masculine lips closed her mouth with a kiss that obliterated every other thought in the universe.

Captured

INTO the deeps of love I cast
The strong net of my wishing,
Enmeshed your errant heart at last—
Was ever better fishing?

—*Edith Tatum*



Vivie watched them enter the gondola

Remembered Rapture

Magic shadows of Venetian nights! Love that she may not take numbs Vivie's heart as another shadow—the shadow of crime—slowly enwraps her

By Beulah Poynter

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

TO escape marriage with a man who does not attract her, Vivie Bowen becomes companion to wealthy Mrs. Craven, who takes her abroad. In Florence she meets and loves Glen Mellish, self-confessed artist, who tells her very little of himself. A mysterious woman, whom Vivie has seen on the train, haunts the lovers.

One night she is seen by Vivie with Mellish, and later Mrs. Craven introduces her as Mrs. Drake, a new friend, with whom they are to travel to Venice. Mrs. Drake informs the girl that her stranger sweetheart is Lord Dunsford, who is traveling with his wife!

CHAPTER VI

THE arrival of the train and the confusion of getting settled upon it helped Vivie in the most embarrassing and miserable hour of her life. Conscious that her cheeks had grayed to the pallor of death, and that Mrs. Drake's shrewd, penetrating eyes lost no detail of her anguish, she somehow got Mrs. Craven into her compartment and stumbled out into the vestibule to fight her battle alone.

Glen a married man! Titled. Winning her confidence and love under an assumed name.

It was incredible — impossible! If only he had not told her he loved her—if only he had offered her friendship, nothing else, she could still cling to a beautiful memory.

If she had not seen him with that woman on the Lungarno, she might have discredited Mrs. Drake's story. If he had not been so secretive about where he lived, what he did—she would have doubted the story. But the title, and a wife, explained so much Vivie had puzzled about and hesitated to ask him.

Why, why had he done it? Shown her a glimpse of what heaven on earth could be, then sent her scuttling into a hades of mortification and wounded love.

And the letter she had written him! The letter throbbing with her deep affection! Fervently now she prayed he would never call at the hotel, just as she had prayed that he would do so when she wrote it.

In her deep hurt she had an impulse to cable Billy that she would become his wife. If by any chance Glen Mellish should follow her to Venice he would find her the *fiancée* of another.

Then she remembered she had refused Billy before she knew Glen Mellish existed; refused him because she knew there would be no happiness in marriage with him. Now, loving another as she did and always would, no matter what Glen had done, marriage could mean nothing but ruin of her own and Billy's lives. And Billy deserved happiness even if there would never be any for her.

Only a faint red light across the fast receding horizon indicated the city of Florence; the city where she had found love and so quickly lost it.

With dry, burning eyes she stared at the light until it, too, vanished—vanished as the light in her life had done.

It was cold in the vestibule. She shivered and drew her coat tighter about her. She half hoped she would become very ill, that some physical pain would mitigate her mental torment. She suffered not alone because she had lost Mellish, nor because her love dream was shattered, but also because her idol had proven worthless clay; a man of rich words, lofty thoughts, and low deeds.

One by one the lights in the Pullman were extinguished and the car was in semidarkness. She had left Mrs. Drake in her employer's compartment, surely by now she was gone.

WHITE-FACED and haggard-eyed, Vivie stepped inside.

Mrs. Craven, in a lavender robe of quilted satin and eiderdown, sat on her bed. Beside her was Mrs.

Drake, elegant in a clinging black gown, her ringless hands clasped languidly in her lap. While the brother, Bob Adams, lounged in the doorway.

"Here's the truant now," Mrs. Drake said with a blitheness that Vivie instinctively knew was assumed. Unquestionably they had been discussing her. There was a guilty expression on Mrs. Craven's cherubic countenance as she faced her companion.

"I didn't know but what you had decided to jump off the train and stay in Florence," she said. "I understand now why you took such a liking to the stupid place."

Vivie did not answer. She brushed by Adams and sat down by the window.

The conversation of the three came to her as from a great distance. There was a roaring in her ears, a sickening palpitation in her breast that made her wonder if one's heart could not break. She felt dead, but for that heavy thud, thud that was almost unbearable.

If only she could be alone, to unloose the tears that smarted her eyes and choked in her throat!

Glen! Oh, Glen!

Could it be less than twelve hours ago she was in his arms; that his lips had wandered over her hair and throat with lingering kisses? Less than twelve hours since he had told her he worshiped her, that she was God's greatest gift—a beautiful girl with intelligence and soul? Less than twelve hours since they had parted under the cypress trees, swearing to love each other until death, and to meet on the following morning?

And now she would never see him again! Or if she did, they would meet as strangers.

Lies, all lies! Oh, God! How could she endure it, go on living, eating, sleeping, as though the whole world had not crashed about her?

CHAPTER VII

THE hazy light of early dawn lay over the flat marshland. Vivie roused from a restless, uneasy slumber, stared with heavy lack luster eyes out of the window.

The train was moving slowly along a trestle. As she watched, without any particular interest in her surroundings, the land became swamped in water—water at first gray, then a deep turquoise blue.

They must be nearing Venice. She studied her time-table, then touched Mrs. Craven's shoulder.

"It isn't long until we reach Venice," she said. "You've just time to dress."

"I don't feel as if I'd slept a minute," the widow groaned. "Oh, dear, how I hate to get up!"

Vivie rang for coffee. It was strong and bitter, but it eased the ache in her temples, and put some life in Mrs. Craven.

Gradually the city of canals and ancient palaces came into view. From the *ponte* on the lagoon the train entered the station. Vivie raised the window and secured a porter, while Mrs. Craven, hugging her bag containing passport and jewels, alighted. Vivie found her upon the platform with Mrs. Drake and Bob Adams. The latter was superintending the removal of trunks from the baggage car.

"Vivie!" Mrs. Craven shrilled. "Mrs. Drake and her brother are going to the Regina. Mr. Adams thinks we'll like it very much, and is going to see if he can't get us rooms near theirs. Just fancy, there isn't a single taxi in this city! We'll have to go there in a

gondola! Did you know that, Vivie? Gondolas are boats! I'll look after the porter while you secure one."

Stepping out of the station, Vivie had a hurried impression of a stone landing with stairs leading down into muddy water; of hundreds of boats with leathery skinned men standing in their prows pushing them forward with long flat oars; of porters running hither and thither, calling out the names of various hotels. As fast as one gondola was filled with passengers and baggage, it moved away to make room for another. On the opposite shore straight, moldy walled buildings rose out of the water. Doorways, water stained and lapped by the waves, opened flush upon the canal.

"Regina! Regina!" called the hotel runner.

With giggles of mock terror, Mrs. Craven settled herself on a leather cushion, and was followed by Doris Drake, Vivie, and Adams. Then the boat was pushed from the dock.

VIVIE had given little heed to Amelia's chatter; she had learned weeks before to close her ears to that garrulous voice; but the expression in Mrs. Drake's eyes jerked her into attention. If the woman was so obviously amused at Amelia Craven, why did she go out of her way to cultivate her acquaintance? What was the attraction?

There could be none unless it was the widow's obvious wealth. Had the couple some ulterior motive?

Vivie chided herself for her suspicions. Was she losing her trust in every one, because one man had proven unworthy?

Suppose she had been too ready to believe the worst of him, that Glen could give her a legitimate reason for his deception? Suppose he and his wife were separated—or he wasn't really married at all?

Oh, she must put him out of her mind. She must try to forget. Every swish of the waves, every breath of salt tanged air, every crumbling wall seemed pregnant with his presence. Venice, the city of romance, of laughter and song, Venice, that she had expected to share with Glen. She was in Venice, and she'd lost him forever.

The gondola drew close to a landing that jutted out into the water. Over the grilled balcony Vivie saw the sign, Regina.

With the assistance of the gondolier, Adams climbed out of the boat.

"Your brother is the *most* considerate man!" Amelia gurgled. "What a comfort he must be in traveling."

"There aren't many like him, I'll admit. But then he isn't always so attentive. He can be quite as selfish as others of his sex when he isn't interested."

Mrs. Craven coughed, and hid her pleased smile with a flirt of her scented handkerchief. "I'm sure he's devoted to you," she murmured.

"He'd like to be devoted to *you*," the other said quietly.

"Oh, no! No!" Mrs. Craven gasped. Vivie saw her cheeks crimson. "He doesn't—er—he hardly knows me."

Mrs. Drake laughed dryly. "Bob is hard hit, if you ask me."

VIVIE'S hands twitched in her lap. Why was the woman piling it on so thick? Bob Adams, if Vivie gauged him at all correctly, was not falling in love with a crude — if wholesome—little woman easily ten years his senior, and Doris Drake knew it.

The suspicion that the pair, for all

their refinement, were little more than adventurers, intruded again and would not be dispelled.

Should she try to warn her employer?

How much good would such a warning do? She'd probably receive her own dismissal. Unquestionably Mrs. Craven would refuse to listen to a word detrimental to the man with whom she was fascinated.

If there was only some way to avoid contact with them. Just at present she was in no position to say or do anything. Mrs. Craven was pleasant enough, but Vivie knew she had not forgotten the scene of the night before, and the girl bitterly regretted having lost her temper.

Adams emerged from the hotel with the information there were no more rooms available. "So I canceled our reservations, Doris, and had the manager phone the Victoria for accommodations for all of us. It's on one of the smaller canals, but will be very comfortable."

Mrs. Craven was effuse with gratitude. She preened like a canary when Adams, bending over, kissed her hand and assured her it was his great happiness to be under the same roof with her.

Vivie closed her eyes with a spasm of pain. Only yesterday Glen had kissed her hand and murmured all he wished in the world was her happiness. She could read insincerity in Bob Adams's trite phrase.

But her heart told her there had been sincerity in Glen's.

THERE was a door between Mrs. Craven's room and Vivie's, but as the widow did not open it, the girl hung her hat and coat in the wardrobe, and drawing a chair to the window, sat there and watched the slow surge of life on the narrow street skirting the canal below.

For an hour or more she was motionless, her eyes staring, yet unseeing. She did not know when the door was opened, nor hear Amelia Craven say she was going out with Mr. Adams.

She was numb, practically without feeling. How easy it would be to die. One leap into the black sluggish water —no one to miss her—none to mourn. Not even Billy—for long.

A coward's way to face tragedy. She wasn't the first who had loved and suffered. She must be brave.

At last she shook off her lethargy. She knocked on Mrs. Craven's door. When there was no response she opened it. Two wardrobe trunks stood in the center of the room. The suitcases were still unopened.

Vivie had duplicate keys, and she began to unpack. As she opened a bureau drawer she saw to her dismay that Mrs. Craven had left her bag with passport and jewels lying in plain view on the marble top.

For a second Vivie was afraid to open it. If any one had entered the room during the widow's absence it would be luck, nothing else, that prevented her from being robbed.

She drew a sigh of relief when she found the contents had not been touched. Three bracelets of clustered emeralds and diamonds—a strand of diamonds with an emerald pendant and earrings to match—and a half dozen rings—diamonds, sapphires and rubies—lay in the satin interior of the bag. Vivie put the bag in a tray of one trunk and locked it securely.

When later Mrs. Craven fluttered in to dress for dinner, she warned her about her carelessness.

"Oh, yes!" the other gasped, wrig-

gling out of her traveling gown. "I had a real fright when I remembered what I had done. But I just couldn't come back, and I knew you were here. Vivie, you must see something of Venice! It's the most romantic place in the world; why, you could fall in love with a Chickashaw Indian here."

Vivie helped her into a gown of green sequins and lace, and gravely handed her the jewels. The widow wrapped a chinchilla cloak about her, and leaning close to the mirror, applied a fresh coating of rouge.

"Have your dinner downstairs, Vivie. Bob and I are dining some place he knows on the Lagoon. We have to go there in a gondola. Oh, Vivie! The moonlight and stars and a gondola! What a pity that young Lord Dunsford isn't here!"

"Moonlight and a gondola with a married man do not appeal to me," the girl answered tensely.

The hours dragged along interminably. Vivie could not bring herself to enter the dining room, and by nine o'clock her head was splitting. A cool breeze came through her open window, and she stood there for some time watching the stars just visible above the walls across from her.

Had Glen gone to Boboli Gardens that morning? Had he got her letter? Or had a guilty conscience informed him why she had failed to appear? What was the woman like who bore his name? Did he love her?

Oh, God, how was it possible to love some one utterly as she loved him and not have her love returned!

Below her the street was ateem with life. Boys and girls, their arms linked together, crossed the bridge. A soft musical soprano lilting the aria from "Butterfly," made her cover her ears and burst into tearless sobs. The dancing lanterns on passing gondolas threw flickering shadows on the dark water of the canal. The twang of a guitar mingled with gay laughter.

She couldn't endure it. The pain in her heart was unbearable. The four walls seemed to be closing in upon her, smothering her. The whole city was a setting for lovers. She, alone, was heartsick and desolate.

SHE snatched up her hat and coat, and with no other objective than a desire to get away from her thoughts, ran down the stairs and into the street. There she mingled with the throng, all the boys and girls, men, women and children intent upon reaching Piazza San Marco, the favorite place of the Venetian.

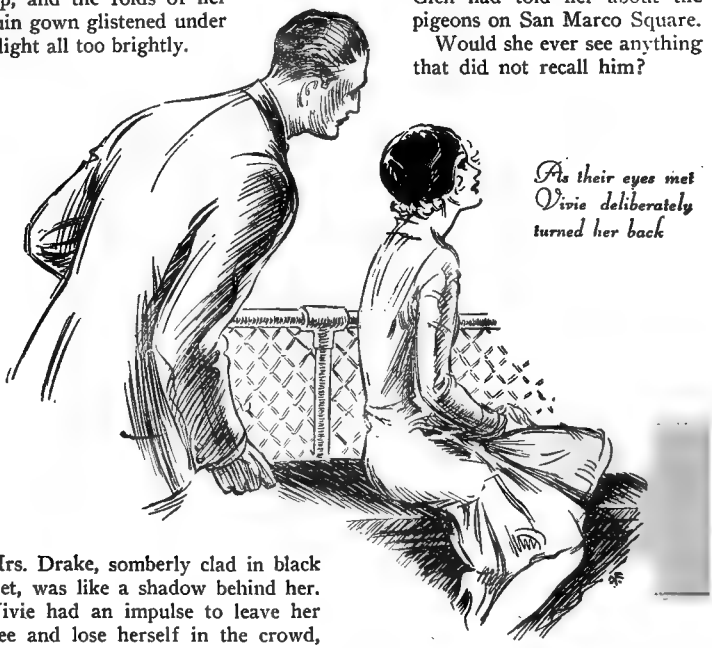
The streets twisted and turned, right, then left, again right, sometimes little more than alleys where no two could walk abreast. The shops were open. Men, their arms laden with embroidered shawls, strands of coral and blown glass beads, offered their wares for sale. Post card vendors called to passers-by. Innumerable paintings of the Bridge of Sighs and the Grand Canal were on display.

Then Vivie found herself in a brilliantly lighted square. Facing her was a cathedral, its mosaic gleaming in the moonlight. In the center of the piazza a band was playing. Small tables lined the pavements. Waiters were hurrying in and out of the open restaurants, serving ices and wine and coffee and sweet, sticky cakes. As on the side streets, the stores were all open, and souvenir shops predominated.

Vivie found a table near the cathedral, dropped into a chair and ordered coffee. As the waiter placed the fragile cup and silver pot before her, she saw Mrs. Craven, leaning on Bob Adams's

arm, approaching. A step behind her was Mrs. Drake.

Amelia was ablaze with diamonds. They scintillated in her ears, about her bare throat, and on her plump arms. She had thrown back her chinchilla wrap, and the folds of her sequin gown glistened under the light all too brightly.



As their eyes met Vivie deliberately turned her back

Mrs. Drake, somberly clad in black velvet, was like a shadow behind her.

Vivie had an impulse to leave her coffee and lose herself in the crowd, but the widow saw her before she could move, and came toward her.

"I'm glad you left that stuffy room, deary," she said cordially. "I was worried about you. It's so gay and lovely out here, and I'm so happy I want every one else to be happy! Do let's have some champagne, Bobbie, I'll stand treat."

Adams drew chairs from another table and the three seated themselves. Vivie refused the wine and tried to concentrate on the music. After their greeting of her the others seemed to forget her presence, and she sat in silence, watching the pigeons which, attracted by crowds and music, fluttered about the square, thousands of them, it seemed to her. She remembered what Glen had told her about the pigeons on San Marco Square.

Would she ever see anything that did not recall him?

Suddenly Mrs. Drake exclaimed sharply: "Bob, look! I do believe there are Lord and Lady Dunsford!"

VIVIE half started to her feet, then dropped back again, her face ashen white. Not ten feet from her, Mellish stood, in conversation with the girl she had seen on the Lungarno, a tall blond girl with the pale hair and athletic figure of an English beauty.

He couldn't have gone to Boboli Gardens that morning and reached Venice at this hour! He couldn't have received her letter and followed her. Yet here he was; so near she had to do little more than whisper his name and he would hear her.

He had never intended to meet her! With his wife he had slipped away, intending to terminate their romance just after his declaration of love!

Her knees began to tremble violently, a desire to shriek made her crush one hand over her mouth.

In the moment before he turned wild tumultous thoughts tumbled over each other in her seething, tormented brain. Jealousy, fierce pride, chagrin, great joy and bitter humiliation.

He had heard Mrs. Drake's ejaculation, and in turning saw Vivie. Absolute bewilderment flashed across his dark face. He whispered something to his companion and moved quickly toward the table.

"Vivie!" he exclaimed with eyes for her alone, "what are you doing in Venice? I thought—"

Her expression killed the sentence. "So nice to see you again, Lord Dunsford," she said icily, extending her hand. "San Marco, in Venice, is almost like Broadway in New York, isn't it? One is certain to meet one's acquaintances here. You know Mrs. Drake, I believe, and Mr. Adams—and I think you've met Mrs. Craven."

He bowed, while the puzzled look in his eyes deepened into one of pain.

Mrs. Drake extended her hand. "I've seen you so much about the hotel in Florence, I almost feel as if I know you and your charming wife. When did you leave the city of flowers?"

"Only this morning on the early train." He had started at the word "wife," and now his eyes again sought Vivie's. "A pressing engagement brought me to Venice."

"Shall you stay long?"

For a moment he hesitated. "That depends upon circumstances," he answered slowly.

HE hadn't known she was here! He hadn't denied being married! The half hope that Doris Drake's story might be untrue died within her.

Vivie felt her mouth harden, grow tense. She forced herself to smile. "We left Florence last night," she said gayly, "just before midnight."

"Where are you staying?" There was no disguising the eagerness in his voice. As he leaned toward her he placed one of his hands on hers. The contact stung her, sent every nerve tingling through her body. She jerked her hand from the table and looked steadily at him.

Never should he know how he had hurt her!

"At the Victoria," Mrs. Craven gurgled. "Do bring your wife to see us, Lord Dunsford. Vivie has told me what great pals you were in Florence. Naughty to have hidden such a friendship from me."

If Mellish heard the invitation he made no response. His gaze was fastened hungrily on Vivie's face, studying the cynical smile on her lovely, quivering mouth, the unveiled scorn depicted in every feature.

"Vivie," he whispered tensely, bending closer, "have lunch with me to-morrow. I must see you alone."

"Sorry," she shrugged her shoulders, "but I have an engagement."

"I sent you a telegram last night when I discovered I had to leave Florence," he continued miserably. "Evidently you didn't get it."

She rose insolently and brushed down her skirt. The gesture was as though she brushed him away. "That doesn't matter in the least," she said coldly. "But I've never made it a habit to lunch with married men—when I know they are married." She laughed lightly. "I'm tired, Mrs. Craven, do you mind if I go back to the hotel?"

"Let me take you to your gondola," Mellish said eagerly.

"Oh, thanks, no. I prefer to walk, and I'm sure"—she glanced across the piazza where Lady Dunsford still stood, immobile, strangely patient—"Lady Dunsford must be annoyed waiting for you."

CHAPTER VIII

ONE victory. A victory with added heartbreak.

What snobs those women were! Because of a title willing to overlook the treachery, the faithlessness, the dishonor of its possessor. Even Amelia Craven, for all her pride in her unblemished reputation, extended hospitality to a man who could be nothing less than a scoundrel.

And she, Vivie Bowen, loved him!

Loved him more in her bitter hour of disillusion than ever before. Why didn't love die when its object proved unworthy? Why couldn't she hate him, despise him as he deserved to be despised?

And he dared approach her with his wife but a few feet away! Dared think she would continue their relation after learning the truth about him!

A sleepless night—a gray dawn, with the rain falling in torrents. Cold chilling rooms. Long dismal hours ahead. Black despair.

At eleven o'clock a bell boy brought her a letter. She had never seen Glen's writing, but she knew the instant she saw the sprawling address on the envelope that it was his.

She knew she should toss it into the fireplace unread, that her safety lay in avoidance of communication of any kind with him. Her love was too deep to be able to withstand many pleas. Others stronger than she had found themselves frail and at the mercy of their emotions to the ultimate tragedy.

Fully aware of this she yet tore open the envelope with trembling fingers and read his message:

VIVIE, MY DEAR ONE:

You are thinking me a cad, probably worse, but if you'll only see me alone I can explain a great deal I dare not put on paper. Every word I said to you in our garden is the truth. I adore you, and I would give my life to spare you one hour of suffering. There never has been, nor ever will be another woman who means one tithe to me what you do. Vivie, won't you meet me at the Duomo at one o'clock? I can't give you up, and you must let me explain. All my love, sweetheart.

GLEN.

Slowly she tore the letter into shreds and tossed it into the fire. This was the end. He had not denied being married, nor his name. She would not see him.

Eleven o'clock, twelve—one. Back and forth she paced the floor. One fifteen. She picked up her hat. Threw it from her, and braced herself for her ordeal. One thirty—two o'clock. Again she had triumphed.

IT was inevitable they should meet again in the next few days. There are not many places where throngs can gather in Venice. The streets are all unbelievably narrow, and not many. San Marco Piazza is the favorite meeting place on pleasant evenings, and

Mrs. Craven, in her newfound happiness, insisted upon dragging Vivie about with her.

Vivie suspected she did it so that Doris Drake would have a companion, leaving Adams to the widow.

The girl had ceased to speculate about the couple. Mrs. Drake could be interesting when she chose, and she possessed infinite tact. Unquestionably she realized Vivie had suffered through Lord Dunsford, yet she never mentioned his name.

Twice as the quartet lolled in a gondola they passed Glen Mellish and the blond woman in another. He raised his hat, and his wife looked at them curiously. Vivie's face whitened, but otherwise she betrayed herself not at all.

Again they met on San Marco Square. Vivie was with Mrs. Drake and Mellish was alone. He paused as though to speak to her, but she hurried on.

A second letter came from him. This one she tore to pieces unread, then regretted her action.

It had turned very warm. In the sun the air was like spring; soft and balmy. Soon tourists would fill the city. Every night one could hear voices singing upon the Grand Canal, and the band playing in the Piazza. As much as possible Vivie avoided both. She knew Glen had not left the city. Whatever his business was it kept him there.

Surely he was not staying because of her.

The strain of acting a part, pretending to be care-free and interested in sight-seeing was telling upon her nerves. Sleepless nights and no appetite were making her thin and wan.

She spent much of her time alone, as Mrs. Craven found Adams's companionship enough. But the widow was growing irritable. Adams never failed in his attention to her, made love to her in a subtle noncommittal fashion, but as she frankly informed Vivie, had not proposed to her.

"It's my money," she wailed in an outburst of confidence. "It's standing between us. He loves me, I'm sure of it, but the dear boy is comparatively poor, and hates to be thought a fortune hunter."

"You don't want to marry him," Vivie said tactlessly. "A man so much younger than yourself."

"Not so much younger," Amelia fended with tight lips. "Only two years. And age has nothing to do with love. Of course I'd marry him, and if he doesn't ask me pretty soon I shall say something."

"Oh, no!" cried the girl in dismay. "Please, Mrs. Craven, you'd never be happy. That nice Lon Stallart from your own home is worth two of Bob Adams."

"Much you know about it. You don't like Bobbie. I've noticed you don't. But he's a gentleman, and Lon is—Lon is just common."

"Lon Stallart is a man," Vivie retorted. "Adams is a polished clothes rack."

"Of all things!" gasped the other. "I'll swear, Vivie, you make me so angry I could just cry. You never saw Lon but once in your life, the day we sailed, and yet you compare him with Bob."

"I saw enough of him to know that he loves you, and would make you a good husband."

Mrs. Craven started to speak, clamped her lips together, then flounced out of the room.

Half an hour later, her anger forgotten, she returned to tell Vivie they

"Where are my diamonds?" she demanded in a voice shrill with excitement

were all going to the Lido, and for her to dress in a hurry.

CHAPTER IX

VIVIE wondered afterward if it was coincidence, or if in some manner Glen had discovered they were going to the beach, and contrived to get on the same boat. At any rate, as she settled herself on a bench by the railing she looked up and saw him standing beside her.

For an instant panic seized her. He was alone, and the others of her party were inside the cabin. There was no way to avoid a tête-à-tête if he refused to be snubbed. Cold perspiration bathed her, and her heart began to beat furiously.

Their eyes met. Then deliberately she turned her back.

He sat down beside her.

"Vivie, why haven't you done as I asked? I've no intention of forcing myself on you if you don't wish it, but you've got to give me a chance to explain."

"I'm not at all interested in your explanations," she answered, "and if you have a shred of manhood you will cease to annoy me!"

"Annoy you? Vivie!"

He took a step nearer.

"I don't know what you think, but you've got to believe I love you. I've been almost mad since that night on the Piazza. I've thought of nothing else but you. I've tried every conceivable way to see you alone. Life isn't worth a darn without you, and when I think of you suffering—"

"Don't flatter yourself I am suffering! We had a few pleasant hours together, Lord Dunsford, but really they meant nothing more to me than they did to you—just a flirtation—harmless and of no consequence."

"You don't mean that, Vivie?"

"I certainly do."

"I refuse to believe you. Those warm responding kisses of yours meant nothing? Never! Vivie, you loved me, if ever a woman loved a man! But for this unfortunate misunderstanding—"

"Misunderstanding!" she interrupted. "You call the fact that you hid from me your real name and your marriage a misunderstanding!"

"That's what I want to explain," he began, but before he could finish Bob Adams came upon the deck and toward them.

The latter nodded indifferently, then addressed Vivie. "Mrs. Craven wants you downstairs," he said.

Vivie rose quickly, and without looking at Mellish, descended to the cabin below. He started as if to follow her,

then sank back onto the bench. His face was as pale as the girl's.

THE warm day and the dazzling sunshine had brought many pleasure seekers to the Lido. The Casino was crowded. Souvenir dealers were doing a thriving business. All the small tables on the balcony jutting over the Adriatic were occupied. The sea was a glorious molten sapphire, the stretch of sand glistening gold.

"So," said Mrs. Craven after Adams, with the aid of a five lira note, had secured a table, "this is the Lido! Well, they should see Atlantic City! This may be very smart, but we've a lot of beaches at home that beat this by a mile."

"Wait until the King of Spain and the fashionables from Paris, Madrid and Vienna arrive," said Mrs. Drake, "then you won't compare this with anything we have at home."

Though it was early, there were many bathers in the water, and the beach was dotted with gayly striped umbrellas and little movable bath houses. Mrs. Craven decided she would like a swim.

"I'm sure the water is cold," Vivie said. "Do you think it wise?"

"I don't mind cold water at all. Will you come with me, Bobbie?"

Bathing suits were obtained. Mrs. Drake, who declared nothing could induce her to go into the sea at that time of year, found a spot on the sand, and Vivie joined her, while Adams and Mrs. Craven started away to dress.

"Give me your bag!" Vivie called after the widow. "It will be safer with me than in the locker."

She had vainly tried to induce the widow to put her diamonds into the vault at the hotel, and was constantly nervous about the widow's careless-

"Why—why, aren't they in your bag?" Vivie faltered

ness. But Mrs. Craven argued, why have jewels unless you wear them; and when she was not ablaze with the precious stones they reposed in the black bag on her arm.

She tossed the bag to Vivie, and with her arm linked in Adams's, tripped blithely away.

"Careless, isn't she?" mused Mrs. Drake, lighting a cigarette. "I'll wager she has a fortune in that bag."

Something prompted Vivie to deny it. "I don't think so, but she does carry her passport about, and sometimes I'm worried she'll lose it."

The long green eyes closed, and their expression became lost in a waft of cigarette smoke.

Vivie hugged her knees and stared at the expanse of water. Here and there vessels, their white sails like angel wings, broke the monotony of vivid blue. Soft winds whipped strands

of hair across her forehead. Billows of white foam washed over the sand, and receded with a musical murmur.

She did not attempt to make conversation. She could see Mrs. Craven and Adams sporting about in the water, Adams lithe and slender in a gray bathing suit, the widow roly-poly in crimson silk, her blond hair tied back with a handkerchief.

A hard line settled about Vivie's mouth. She was young, attractive—and poor, and love was denied her. Amelia had wealth, and that wealth would purchase the man she wanted.

Glen loved her. Oh, she was certain of it now. Whether he had the legal right to do so or not—he loved her. His lips might utter lies, but only deep feeling could have brought that pallor to his cheeks. Yet—

Would she go on forever aching for the sound of his voice, the touch of his lips? Was there nothing that could deaden the pain? She was so young, there were so many bleak years before her. She wanted to be good, but oh, it was hard. Perhaps it would be best to ask Mrs. Craven to release her and go back to New York. Ambition was dead, but she might find a kind of peace with Billy; maybe forget her misery in making him happy.

THE knowledge that Glen was somewhere on the beach intensified her restlessness. Several times she imagined she saw him among the bathers, and her head grew dizzy. When he did appear close at hand she was strangely calm.

He walked along leisurely, his feet sinking deep in the sand. His brows were drawn in a deep frown, and his bronze face was haggard and lined. Unseen by him, Vivie watched him for several moments, her hands gripped tightly together. So near—and yet what a distance between them!

"I wonder what his lordship has done with his wife," Mrs. Drake commented dryly. "I see he's alone. Something tells me all isn't well in their dovecote. He left her to her own resources a lot when in Florence." She looked shrewdly at Vivie as she spoke.

As though he had heard her voice, Mellish turned and looked at them. He did not move for a moment, then with a perceptible bracing of his shoulders he came directly toward them.

"Mrs. Drake," he said curtly, "will you please pardon Miss Bowen for a few minutes? It is necessary that I speak confidentially with her."

His tone made Vivie's cheeks crimson with anger. How dare he proclaim their past intimacy to this woman?

She sprang to her feet, and the bag of jewels dropped unheeded upon the sand.

Mrs. Drake laughed lightly. "Go ahead, whisper all you like, I shan't listen, and I understand."

His fingers closed on Vivie's arm, and almost without knowing what she was doing she found herself pulled several feet away from the other woman.

She started to protest, but he interrupted her tensely. "Listen, no matter what you think of me, or whether you care a darn about me or not, I've got to warn you against that precious pair. They're crooks! If you don't want your employer robbed of everything she possesses, tell her to get rid of them at once."

"How — how do you know this?" she stammered.

"You'll have to take my word for it. But do this, Vivie, warn her or it will be too late." Before she could reply he swung on his heel and walked quickly away.

The next instant she realized she did not have the bag on her arm.

WITH a cry of dismay she whirled about and ran back to where Mrs. Drake sat motionless, an inscrutable expression in her lazy eyes.

The bag lay on the sand where Vivie had dropped it. She retrieved it quickly with a half sob of relief.

"I never," drawled Doris Drake. "Don't tell me you left that bag lying there. You're more careless than Amelia. His lordship must be fascinating to make you forget your duties."

"He had nothing to do with me forgetting this," Vivie answered tartly. She wanted very much to get away from Mrs. Drake and open the bag. If what Glen had told her was true, and the woman was a thief, she had had ample opportunity to secure its precious contents. Vivie could not examine the bag now after having declared there was nothing of value in it. Certainly it looked as though it hadn't been touched, and she had been gone less than two minutes.

The arrival of Mrs. Craven, fully dressed and ready to catch the next boat for Venice, made the examination impossible.

With some misgivings Vivie relinquished the bag and followed to the Casino.

The crowd had thinned out and Mellish was not to be seen.

CHAPTER X

VIVIE pondered over his warning.

She remembered her early suspicions of the pair, suspicions that to a great extent had been dispelled.

Adams might be a fortune hunter, she was almost positive he was, but it did not seem probable that he was anything worse. Both he and his sister had had many opportunities to profit by the widow's carelessness. Mrs. Drake had had access to her room at all times. Many a night, wearing all her jewels, Amelia had spent hours alone with Adams.

And yet Mellish had made the bald statement: "They are crooks."

After all why should she believe what Mellish said, since *he* had proven himself a cad?

She decided of a sudden to write to Lon Stallart, the man in Paducah, Texas, who really had the widow's interests at heart. She would word the message carefully, feeling sure that if it were possible he would catch the first Italian steamer and join them.

Vivie had seen him but once, and had liked him. She knew he and Mrs. Craven kept up a correspondence. That proved her feeling for him was more than mere friendship. If the blow fell, and Amelia discovered Adams was a scoundrel, she would have some one to comfort her—and Stallart might win her on the rebound.

Vivie smiled bitterly at the thought of turning matchmaker—she who had failed so miserably at winning happiness for herself. She wrote a discreet little message. She informed Stallart that Mrs. Craven was lonely, and because of it had made some rather undesirable acquaintances. "I'm sure if you could find time for a vacation in Italy she would be overjoyed to see you," Vivie added.

Sealed and stamped, she took the letter downstairs and gave it to the clerk at the desk to post for her. Then, with a half guilty feeling she returned to her room. Mrs. Craven would be

angry if she learned of the letter, but Vivie felt justified in sending it.

AS she opened the door the widow confronted her.

"Where are my diamonds?" she demanded in a shrill voice.

"Why—why, aren't they in your bag?"

"You know they aren't. I hoped you'd taken them out and hidden them, but if you haven't—"

Vivie stared at her in horror. A sudden dropping of her heart made her sway. "You mean they've been stolen?" she gasped.

"Well, I left them with you. You asked me to. That bag hasn't been out of my possession since you handed it to me on the beach. And I never opened it until five minutes ago. The diamonds were in it when I gave it to you. They aren't there now."

"Have you looked carefully in the lining—every place?"

"Of course I've looked. I thought at first I might have left them in my trunk. But I didn't."

"The bureau drawers?"

"No, I put them in that bag. I'm positive of it. And they're gone."

Vivie's knees crumpled under her. She was compelled to sit down. "It's true then," she said dully. "Oh, why didn't I warn you!"

"What do you mean?"

"I've had suspicions of them all along. To-day Mr. Mel—er—Lord Dunsford, told me they were crooks, and that—"

"Who are you talking about?" interrupted the widow.

"Mr. Adams and his sister."

"Wha-at! You're accusing them—my friends! Why, you ungrateful, evil-minded little hussy! My friends, when you—you—I didn't want to say it, I wanted to give you a chance to explain first—but if there's any one who's a crook around here, you're that person!"

Vivie looked at her steadily. The enormity of the accusation did not at first stun her as it did later. "You mean you think I stole your jewels?" she asked calmly.

"You had the opportunity, and you are poor." Amelia had the grace to blush.

"I never opened your bag. I dropped it for a moment on the beach beside Mrs. Drake, but I never opened it. She was with me all the time and—"

"I'll call her and see what she says." Mrs. Craven put her hand on the door.

"No, no, don't!" Vivie cried. "Call the police first, don't play into her hands."

"If I call the police it will be to arrest you," steadily. "Doris has no reason for robbing me, even if she wanted to. She's a rich woman. I won't have her insulted. I'll give you just five minutes to return my diamonds or I'll send for the house detective."

"Send for him," Vivie cried hysterically. "He'll never find them on me!".

"Bruce Wade—coming here?" Billy eyed her sister curiously

Yesterday's Lover

Bitter-sweet memory held Evelyn prisoner even though love was knocking at the portals of her heart

By Du Vernet Rabell

EVELYN WINTHROPE paused at her sister's door and knocked tentatively. "It's nothing really important," she called. "I just wanted you to see if I looked all right."

The door swung open and Evelyn stepped into a confusion of evening dresses, golf clubs, overturned hat boxes, and about twenty-five pairs of slippers. Her sister, Billy—she had been christened Wilhelmina — was perched on a wardrobe trunk smoking a cigarette; her costume consisted of a pair of pink striped shorts and a beach coat, and she looked as if she belonged on the cover of a magazine for August.

"I'm contemplating a week-end," she explained, "and I never can decide how to pack until I get out every rag I own. It's a good idea—I got it from the movers."

"But we've never moved," Evelyn laughed.

"I know, no Winthrope ever moved, but that's what the movers did when the Moores went to Paris." She leaned

back and blew a reflective smoke ring across the room; as it drifted by her, Evelyn put her finger through it—the fourth finger of her left hand.

Billy was looking at her attentively. There was an intangible freshness about the younger girl, like very early spring flowers. "What's the idea of that outfit?" Billy asked. "Nature never made you for sport things, darling; you were made for sprigged muslins and drooping hats, ruffled lingerie and scented tresses—haven't I told you, and told you? And haven't you found out by now—let me see, it's sixteen years since I assumed your care, is it not: you were four and I was six—that sister is always right?"

Evelyn's eyes crinkled and her young mouth tip-tilted at the corners. "Aunt Ray would have a fit if she heard that!"

"Yes," Billy agreed. "The dear thing likes to sigh over 'the loving sacrifice' she made when 'their poor dear mother passed away.' As a matter of fact she was in luck to inherit such nice kids as we were, all ready made, no trouble or anything. She'd never have produced such a pair. Even if she had married father. Town gossip says she was in love with father. I often wonder what he was really like. Just think of having a father everybody was crazy about, and having him drowned at sea before you ever met him."

"You're like him," Evelyn said. "Everybody is crazy about you."

"As well they may be," Billy assured her briskly. "I've provided enough interest, gossip and what not, goodness knows! I'm the town's three-ring circus. A trying job, too! Now you are different. You're the kind who sits in your rose bower and people—men mostly—bring you 'the fruits of victory.'"

Evelyn considered this. "I don't remember anybody doing that—"

Billy jumped off the trunk and gave her a quick hug. "Hooey! The trouble with you is, you always put your hands behind you when a man comes 'bearing gifts.'" Billy's speech was full of quotations. It was her line, and her circle always sat up around her like expectant bird dogs, waiting to laugh every time she opened her lips.

"Well, but Billy," Evelyn was saying, "if I never had any use for what you call 'the fruits of victory'—"

"My dear," Billy advised her solemnly, "take anything a man offers, whether you have any use for it or not. Men are best as givers. The Lord meant *men* when He said: 'It is better to give than to receive.'"

"Billy! I think it's awful to quote the Bible!"

"Tut, tut—don't preach, it isn't your rôle. Which brings me back to rôles, and parts, and costumes. Go and take off the one you have on. What did you put it on for?"

EVELYN looked at her, looked away, and a flush crept up to her dark eyes. It was her eyes that made Evelyn Winthrope lovely—they contrasted so startlingly with her fair hair. She'd never bobbed her hair—Billy wouldn't let her. She wore it piled on top of her head, with gilt hairpins trying to hold the straying curls away from her ears.

"I wanted—well, Billy, to-night I thought I'd like—"

"I've missed something," Billy interrupted. "Who is he?"

Her sister turned away. "Maybe you haven't. I haven't had much experience, maybe I'm making something out of nothing. Only when Bruce Wade said he'd like to come over—"

"Bruce Wade—coming here?"

Billy paused, a match halfway to her fresh cigarette.

"Yes, he telephoned, and said if half the town's male population wouldn't be occupying our porches, sun room, and summerhouse, he'd like to drop in. He asked me to wear a blue dress. He said—" Evelyn stopped. "He said he wanted to tell me something." She stopped again, and laughed, but it was a wavering, uneven little laugh. "Maybe he just wants to tell me that the bank has declared a dividend."

Billy glanced out of the window. "With a full moon, madonna lilies in our garden, and you in a blue dress? No, my child, he does not want to tell you that the bank has declared a dividend." She eyed her sister curiously. "Bruce Wade! Why every girl in this town has done her stuff for him, and did he but look at any young matron her home was no longer safe! When did he start to notice you?"

There was a cutting edge to her tone, and, seemingly realizing it, she made all haste to add: "Of course I'm jealous. He never looked at me, and I've done my best tricks for him ever since he came home from the war at twenty-two, a machine gun major."

"He never noticed me particularly," Evelyn told her, "before the day I made out a check on the Northern Valley Trust. You know I haven't any account there, but I paid for something by check at that new gift shop and didn't notice when the woman gave me the blank check that it wasn't on the National. And the next time I went in, Bruce Wade called me into his office. He was very nice and everything, but sort of solemn, and explained—you know, all about its being a penitentiary offense—and I was awfully scared. I didn't cry, but—"

"Say no more! He was sunk. I know how you look when divided between fright and tears. Any man at once buckles on his armor and goes 'forth to slay the dragon.' I remember in school when you couldn't add up two columns of figures—and you never could—and Miss Manton used to get you up to the blackboard. If the looks cast on her by every boy in the room could have done their dirty work she would have dropped dead before our eyes. Why was I born with a brain and a sense of humor? Look what I might have landed!"

"But Billy, I haven't landed—"

"Hush, don't use slang. And why, may I ask, didn't you put on the blue dress when you were asked to?"

EVELYN looked down at the daffodil yellow crape that hugged her round knees. "Well, he once said you looked great in this dress—so I thought—"

"Never think, darling. There will always be those who love you to do it for you."

Billy's finger lifted the other's chin. "And how I do love you: because your voice is 'the soul of the nightingale poured down from a mogra tree in the rajah's garden,' because your hands are 'cool white lilies at dawn,' because your body is 'a willow in the wind'—"

"Billy, Billy, do you think—do you think that Bruce knows I'm any of those things? I never dreamed I was—and maybe he didn't either. Do you suppose he will love me as you do?"

Billy grinned. "No, my dear, he will not love you in the way I do. Bruce is a caveman—his love will be possession, toleration, tenderness, the showering of gifts—and a total lack of understanding. Lucky, you are! 'God gave

them youth, God gave them love—and even God could give no more!"

HALF an hour later Evelyn, attired in a crisp blue organdie, walked down the flagged path of the Winthrope garden, looked attentively at the rustic bench that stood beside the madonna lilies, and then abruptly put two hands over her cheeks, and all but ran back to the house. No, she couldn't be so obvious.

The tall grandfather clock in the hall was striking eight thirty. Bruce had said he'd be there about nine. Evelyn sat down on the bottom step of the winding stair and picked up the evening paper.

She glanced over the headlines.

Startlingly her color faded; her lips parted and drew in.

Something sweet and gay and innocent—died in her eyes!

A LONG gray car swept up the driveway, and a long gray man unfolded himself from behind the wheel and got out. Bruce Wade usually wore gray; his eyes were gray, and, despite the fact that he was only thirty-two, there was gray in the dark hair behind his ears. Once some one viewing his medals—a thing Bruce hated, but that his mother made part of every gathering in her home—hearing what he had got them for, had marveled that he had come out of the war alive.

Evelyn sprang to her feet and ran out on the porch. It was growing dusk out there, and her small face was hardly more than a blur. Even when her visitor stooped and peered into it, as he did when he stood holding her hand in his.

"Your hands are cold," he exclaimed. "What's the matter—don't you feel well?"

"Oh, yes, I'm always well, but it's been a hot day." Evelyn tried to recover her hand, but the man simply tightened his lean brown fingers.

"Have you reserved us two nice seats in the garden?" he asked next.

Ordinarily Bruce Wade was the most self-contained of mortals—his well-cut mouth had a slightly cynical twist, and his deep set gray eyes a cool satirical glint—but to-night he was plainly nervous, he kept biting his lips, and his eyes were dark, almost black.

"It's nice down by the lilies," Evelyn suggested faintly, "but it's damp. Maybe we'd better sit on the porch."

Bruce cast scornful eyes along the long porch. "This is not the setting I'm looking for at all," he said decidedly. "Your first idea was the best. I haven't seen your garden often, but, being your garden, I know it's beautiful—and it's a wonderful place—what I mean is—"

Evelyn walked down the path beside him.

They had reached the bench and Bruce bent down and touched the seat.

"It isn't damp at all. Sit down here, you little dryad, and tell me why you didn't want to come down here with me—it was plain you didn't."

"I did want to come. I came here just a little while ago, and thought how sweet it was."

The man leaned forward and took her two small hands. They were still cold. "I wish you had stayed here—waited for me here—it would have been something to have remembered all my life—"

"I didn't know you'd surely come."

"Oh, yes, Evelyn, you knew I'd surely come. You're pretty young—

just about the youngest twenty I ever knew—but you knew I'd come."

Evelyn made a great business of laughing gayly.

"A girl can never be sure."

Bruce pressed the palms of her hands against his face. Evelyn felt a nerve twitch on the fingers of her left hand.

"I know this—this evasiveness of yours isn't a 'line'—but it has got me off my feet just as effectively as if it were. That's why I wish I could have met you in the dark; I'm not a kid, and I'm not a fool, but I could have managed myself, what I want to say, better. I would love to have walked down that path and have seen you sitting here—a little wraith in the moonlight—I'd have loved to have had you jump up and run to meet me—"

"But I wouldn't have done that," Evelyn protested. Her voice was shaking and she kept closing her eyes, as if she were trying to bear a pain, a pain that was hurting her cruelly, but deep down inside.

Bruce gestured impatiently. "Oh, I am bungling this! You'd think this was the first time I had ever sat in the moonlight with a young lovely girl—the first time I had ever—" Suddenly he bent forward and his lips touched hers, a light, brief, almost unconscious kiss—if any man ever kisses unconsciously. Women do, of course, but only their babies, and, when the eternal mother is uppermost in them, the men they love.

Evelyn slipped free and rose. It was as if she saw, opening ahead, a way of escape. "Oh—you make those pretty speeches—and yet I am not the first—you have—there have been other girls—"

With a movement as effortless as a cat's, Bruce was on his feet and had her in his arms. His voice was rough and uneven. "Of course there have been other girls—how else could I know that you are the only one? Certainly you are not the first girl I have kissed—like this—held close—like this."

There was nothing unconscious about his kisses now, his lips were as burning as his eyes.

She was struggling frantically. "You have no right to tell me I am not the first—"

Bruce laughed exultantly. "No, I haven't. All men are fools when they tell a woman—even a girl like you—the truth! You are not the first—but you're going to be the last, you can be sure of that—"

Slowly Evelyn relaxed into his arms. She raised her dark eyes and kept them fixed on his until their warmth and glow seemed to melt into his.

"Kiss me—kiss me like that—just once again," her breath fluttered between her parted lips, "and then go—please go."

AFTER a long moment Bruce released her. He looked dizzy, shaken. Twice he tried to speak, but could only shake his head helplessly.

Finally:

"It's no use—I can't say anything—I can't even think." He laughed down at her. "What do you mean, 'Please go'? Don't you know I'm never going? Evelyn, listen to me. Come with me to-night—now—let's get married. I know a judge over in Middleford."

"No! Oh, no!" she wailed like a terrified child. "Don't talk to me like that. I—oh, Bruce—please, please don't kiss me again. You don't understand—you don't—"

"Evelyn, stop! I understand, but you don't. I understand because I love you—love you dearly—completely. See, dear. I can take you in my arms—gently—like this. That doesn't frighten you, does it? It doesn't make you feel as you did before? But, darling, I want you to feel that way—for me. I want you—"

"Bruce—please. I'm afraid again—of you—" and she broke in his ardent hands like a piece of old china.

"No, you're not afraid of me. You're afraid of yourself. You adorable little puritan!"

"I'm not."

"Evelyn, you love me, don't you?"

Her eyes, wide, tortured eyes now, traveled around the garden. Her garden of Gethsemane; that so many women know in losing, and often finding, their love. Her eyes came back, infinitely weary.

She said: "No, I do not love you."

Bruce laughed down at her. "You could tell me that a hundred times, make a song of it, make a prayer of it, and still I would not believe you. Not after having felt your heart beat against mine."

She repeated steadily and with a dreadful air of finality: "I do not love you."

"But you kissed me."

Despite what he had said before, there was panic in Bruce Wade's voice.

"That wasn't love. You ought to understand that. Men do—it's what they feel for a girl, any girl, when they want to kiss her—make love to her. It's just—" She stopped and laughed, wild hysterical laughter that had neither mirth nor beauty in it; on lips as sweetly young as Evelyn's it was terrible. "It's just 'the man, the place, and the phase of the moon.' Billy says that. It's amusing—"

"It's damnable!"

She kept her eyes steady on his, but her lips quivered. "Yes—I guess it is. But I had to tell you."

Bruce stiffened. "Tell me what?"

Evelyn swept her hand across her heavy eyes. Then deliberately she smoothed down the ruffles of the blue organdie. Finally she turned and walked away from him, down the garden path. Fifteen feet from the bench she paused, but she didn't look back. "I love some one else—I thought I didn't, but I do. I have always loved him—I belong to him, and soon he will be coming to get me."

EVELYN, head bent as she went along the upper hall, didn't answer when her sister hailed her. But she wasn't quick enough to get the door of her own room closed. She tried to hold it shut, but Billy put a young shoulder, strengthened by many rough and unladylike games, against the panel and shoved it open. Then she stopped short and stared at her sister.

"Do you mean to tell me he didn't ask you to marry him?" she demanded violently. "The dirty bum!"

Evelyn drew her crumpled handkerchief along her upper lip, where the perspiration stood out like beads. She put back two or three gilt hairpins that were slipping from her hair. Then she went and sat in the high-backed Windsor chair by the window, and folded, folded tightly, her hands in her lap.

She was heart-rendingly typical of her race as she sat there: the wives and daughters of those stern-lipped men. Men strong enough to be hard on themselves for the good of their souls, hard on the world for the good of what they thought the sins of the world — and hard on their women because they were created soft, loving—and yielding.

"Bruce did ask me to marry him," Evelyn said after a minute, in an even, expressionless little voice, "but I found I couldn't."

Billy was not easily startled, but she took a quick step forward. "You found you couldn't! For my sake, why? If ever I saw 'young maidenhood gone forth to claim her crown' it was you an hour ago."

Evelyn took a leaf from her sister's book. "'An hour can be a life,'" she quoted.

"Don't let's patter," Billy snapped, looking distinctly annoyed. "What happened?"

She waited, hands pressed to madly beating heart

Evelyn answered, with eyes turned to the window: "I'm going to tell you, Billy, and then we won't ever have to talk about it again, will we?"

"No, we won't. And you don't need to tell me now if you'd rather not."

"I want to. I couldn't marry Bruce because I belong to somebody else."

"What?"

"Do you remember Lindsay Curtis?" Evelyn asked her.

"The town's prodigal son? I should say I do. And did you read in the paper to-night that he isn't dead at all? That he's been found in some Eskimo village and that he's on his way back? Say, won't this town kill the fatted calf?" She stopped suddenly. "But Evelyn—you don't mean Lindsay Curtis when you say you belong to somebody else?"

"Yes, I do."

BILLY drew a small chair up to her sister's knees. "Evelyn, you don't mean Lindsay, say you don't. Lindsay Curtis was a rotter, but even he couldn't be that bad."

"He wasn't so bad. He was just—just himself." Her soft voice took on a note of bitter meditation. "Billy, people are like chemicals, they can't help their effect on other people. Lindsay couldn't help his effect on me."

"He could have let you alone—a young inexperienced kid like you."

"How could he do that in this small town? You're bound to meet whether you want to or not; on the street or at people's houses."

"But Evelyn, baby, I never noticed. If I had, you can bet—"

"There wasn't anything to notice. It began the year we were confirmed. I was about fifteen, and felt so wicked because I wasn't a bit uplifted, as I should have been. I didn't feel that I was dedicating myself to God. I just felt scared to death that I was going to have to kneel there before all those people." She stopped, and her eyes lifted to the stars outside her window.

"Then the Sunday before Easter, Lindsay sang 'The Palms.' Oh, Billy, do you remember his voice. It was like a great, strong-winged bird, mounting, mounting."

"Yes, I do. I got a lift of the hair on the back of my neck myself."

"And that morning," Evelyn went on softly, "when he sang I felt the way I'd wanted to feel—purified—holy. Lindsay Curtis gave me my religion."

"Lindsay Curtis gave you your religion—Lindsay Curtis—ye gods!"

"HE gave me more than that." Evelyn pulled back the ruffled curtain and a halo of moonlight felt on her fair hair. She looked like a distraught young saint. "I'm not a bit like you, Billy. I've always been afraid of things. I've always been shy. I never made friends easily. And when I got to be seventeen, and all the girls were going with boys, I used nearly to die. I was so self-conscious, so terrified at parties. I was simply frightened out of my life about love! And yet I used to read love stories. I slept with *Tristan* under my pillow."

"Enter Romeo! And where was I?"

"You were away at school. Lindsay had joined that stock company we had here that winter."

"I know; he was crazy about the leading woman, Jeanne Doreé, or some such name."

"He was married to her," Evelyn said quietly.

"And made love to you! Low as a duck's instep!"

"He played in 'If I Were King.' I saw it four times the week they played it, and on Saturday afternoon the leading man sprained his ankle, and Lindsay had his part. And those lines—

> "If I were King. Oh, Love, if I were King
> What tributary nations would I bring
> To kneel before your scepter, and to swear
> Allegiance to your eyes, your lips, your hair."

"I don't remember the words exactly, but the sense of them sang in my heart. And love became something beautiful. I wasn't afraid of it any more. Love meant a man making you a queen—taking care of you. I suppose this sounds awfully silly to you."

"It sounds tragic. You were born a hundred years too late. Go on about Lindsay."

"He was married, and unhappy. His wife didn't understand him."

BILLY'S hard young jaw actually sagged.

"He pulled that line—and you fell for it?"

"Why, yes, it was true. Lindsay said it was. He told me the things she used to say to him. They were cruel. She said he couldn't act!"

"He couldn't either. He never forgot himself long enough."

"Oh, but Billy, he had a beautiful voice."

Agitatedly her sister lit a cigarette and blew a puff of smoke.

"I'll bet you that if every home-wrecker in the world were lined up for inspection you'd find the whole gang had tenor voices and used to sing in the village choir."

"I used to meet him," Evelyn was continuing. "We used to drive sometimes together, or go to the little country churches where we didn't know anybody. He just wanted me to listen to his dreams."

"Was that all he wanted?" Billy interrupted sharply.

"Yes—or at first it was all. He was dreadfully unhappy, but he was so brave about it. He said he had made a mistake, but he wasn't going to let it ruin his life. He said his visions were so great that he mustn't let his personal failure stand in the way of their fulfillment. Lindsay had courage. And he taught me courage. Don't you see, Billy, Lindsay taught me everything worth while in life? Faith. Love. Courage."

Billy slipped to her knees, and put her arms around the other's waist. "Darling, you were born with those."

"No, Billy. Not with courage, anyway. In the end—in the end I was afraid to run away with Lindsay. And when he saw I just couldn't do as he wanted me to—he faced it. I felt terrible!"

"*You* felt terrible?"

"Yes. It was just before he left. You know he made up his mind very suddenly to go with that Arctic Expedition. Professor Wilding had been his professor in college, things weren't going well at the theater—well, anyway, he thought it best to go.

"We drove up to his uncle's camp on the lake and he wanted me to stay there with him, just the two or three days before he left. He said he wanted to see what life could have been for him if he had married the girl God intended him to have. He said he wanted to know when he was way up there in that frozen land, facing death, that some one loved him well enough to give him the supreme gift—"

"Evelyn!" Billy's arms were rigid. "Little sister, you didn't?"

"No—I—"

Billy's voice came in muffled tones from the folds of Evelyn's dress. "I've been an ungrateful hussy all my life, but, believe me, I'm thanking God now!"

THEN swiftly she straightened. "Now listen to me, Evelyn. If this is the reason you turned Bruce Wade down, forget it! You had an infatuation for Lindsay Curtis, and his being away has made it seem real. Girls are that way sometimes, emotionally subject to their imaginations. You'd have got over it in no time if he'd stayed home. So now you run along and telephone Bruce. Or do you want me to?"

"Billy, you don't understand at all. I can't call up Bruce. I can't marry him. I think I could have if Lindsay had never been found—if I knew he was dead. When the papers finally said there was no hope of any of the expedition being left alive I was—oh—I was glad!" She began to cry. "Billy, Billy, I'm so wicked. I come from nice people; how can I be so wicked?"

"Yes," Billy snapped at her. "You come from intelligent people, too. How can you be so dumb?"

"Dumb?"

"Yes! Think of Bruce Wade, the kind of a man he is: fine, the best family in the country, prominent. He's just about made this town."

"Oh, Billy, I know all that—that's why I won't marry him. Look what I might let him in for, what it would mean to a man in his position. What if I married him and some time I should meet Lindsay unexpectedly?"

"Well, what if you did?"

"If he held out his hand—I'd just go with him!"

"You didn't before."

"It all happened so quickly. What I was, my upbringing, my people were stronger. But if Lindsay had stayed he would have broken down all that. He had some strange power over me. Maybe he hypnotized me," she smiled a crooked little smile.

"You hypnotized yourself."

Evelyn made a hopeless little gesture. "What does it matter if the feeling is there?"

Billy looked into the dry eyes and small drawn face. "To think how wise I've always thought myself, and I can't think of a thing to do for you."

"There's nothing to do," Evelyn said limply, "except wait."

SO they waited.

Evelyn Winthrope waited, and Bruce Wade waited.

Although it was hard to say what he was waiting for. Evelyn didn't even open his letters. Letters which he wrote at dawn in his library and, when they were returned to him that same night he reread and felt desperately to be totally inadequate.

Then the town was draped in bunting and the hero returned to his own. The mayor stood on the steps of the courthouse and made a speech, and gave him the key of the city, in gold; other dignitaries made speeches and presented him with framed resolutions. Congress gave him a medal set in diamonds.

Billy Winthrope took quite a part in all these doings, as she always had been in the leadership of such affairs.

But Evelyn didn't even see Lindsay Curtis until he had been home two weeks. She was getting over some sort of fever. In olden times they called it brain fever. Girls often had it, something to do with their minds getting mixed up with their emotions. But in modern times it is an almost unknown complaint.

THE first night she was downstairs Evelyn wrote Lindsay Curtis a note. Then she put on her blue organdie, noted that there was a moon, and went and sat on the rustic seat beside the lily bed. The madonna lilies had gone the way of all frail and beautiful things who fling too much sweetness into the world, but the moon still shone: not silvery as in June, but a deep, hot gold. And there was scarlet salvia dripping along the borders.

Footsteps sounded along the flagged walk. They came nearer and a man, a shorter, stockier man than Bruce Wade, a man with an air of superb self-assurance, came down the path.

Evelyn rose. The silk cord on which her pearls were strung snapped under her desperate clutch and the jewels went rolling around the walk like frozen tears. But she held out her hands.

"Lindsay—Lindsay—you did come back."

There was something **negligent**

about the way he took her into his arms, something insolently expectant as he bent over her lips.

"Of course I came back," he said, and added, "to you." But the added phrase had a practiced ring. It had ardor enough, but lacked something. Truth perhaps.

Evelyn drew back and looked up at him.

She looked at him with the wide, dispassionate gaze of a child seeing something for the first—and possibly the last—time.

"You still love me, Lindsay—want me?"

He waited before he answered her; it was as if he wanted to make her uncertain, nervous. Then his arms tightened. "I came back—and found you waiting."

THE Wade's old butler, Pierson, did not like to be called out of bed at two thirty of a morning, and as he stood at the telephone he was decidedly testy. "No, Miss Evelyn, I couldn't possibly call Mr. Bruce. He was working in his library until half an hour ago and must be asleep. But, Miss Evelyn—"

Then the receiver was jerked out of his hand and Bruce was talking into the phone, talking in a voice the old man scarcely recognized.

"Evelyn—you want me—"

The answer was very faint, very far away. "Yes, Bruce, I do."

Pierson caught his master at the door. "But Mr. Bruce—surely you must dress."

Bruce Wade was a man who had been in many situations in his life that called for speedy dressing. But it is doubtful whether he ever got into his clothes as speedily. The Winthrope house was almost two miles from his own and in less than twenty minutes he was striding down the path toward the rustic seat. No mention had been made of this spot as a meeting place, yet Evelyn was there.

With her in his arms he drew a deep breath, as one who comes out of a nightmare of pain.

"Darling—oh, just stand quietly like this—for a little while. I don't care why you sent for me—I suppose there was something—"

Evelyn's two soft hands were pressed possessively against his face, and her smile was all soft sweetness and exaltation.

"Yes, Bruce, it *was* something."

Bruce bent his dark head. "Don't tell me now—we have years ahead for just saying things, and this moment will never come again. Evelyn—Eve—my Eve—to-night the world is newly made—you are the first woman God created—and He fashioned you, every inch of you—for me."

The paper in her hand bore an exact likeness of the dragon!

Bride of the Dragon

Fate spoke, and Sue North was lured into a weird and colorful adventure

By Doris Knight Jessee

SUE NORTH toiled up the hill, and came to a stop in the shadow of old St. Mary's church in Chinatown. She was all out of breath from her climb, but two things had influenced her against taking one of the little brown cable cars which crawled up and down California Street like so many bugs clinging to a mountainside.

First, Sue liked to walk. All day long she bent over a typewriter, making copies of insurance papers—a most sedentary occupation. Second, Terry was almost always late. To-day she had made up her mind to be tardy, but even as the thought crossed her mind, the clock on St. Mary's struck.

She glanced up. Six o'clock. Just the time they had set.

Dusk was creeping on, but Sue could make out the familiar words above the clock: *"Son, Observe the Time, and Fly from Evil."* Sue smiled and pulled her coat closer. Who wouldn't fly from

evil? Nobody *wanted* to be evil. It was just something that happened—like measles or missing a train!

Lights sprang into sudden life up and down the narrow street. The street lamps in front of Sing Fat's were all huge lanterns. Clever people, these Chinese. They understood the art of salesmanship. They made things seem romantic, bizarre, slightly clandestine. That brought tourists flocking. As a born San Franciscan, Sue adopted a rather bored attitude toward tourists.

Terry was different, of course!

She thought about him as she shivered a little, and hugged her big coat closer. A sudden gust of clean wind, blowing straight from the bay, eddied around the church corner, picking up some papers and carrying them along.

One of the white bits struck Sue square in the face. Without thinking, she caught it in her hand. She looked down. By the light of the street lamp, she saw a gilt dragon painted on the white background. Still smiling, she opened her purse and thrust in the paper. It might bring her good luck—and she needed it right now. Terry—

"Hello, Sue!"

He had come out of the darkness somewhere, so swiftly that she had not seen his approach. He caught both her hands in his. She thrilled to the electric spark that seemed to leap from his touch. She was glad she was *carrying* her gloves—

"Been waiting long?"

He was bending over her, in that intimate, possessive way he had.

Sue shook her head. Even if she had been waiting an hour, she would have denied it.

"My, this is a wonderful night!" He breathed deeply. "Anything might happen on such a night as this!" He waved a hand, oblivious of passing Orientals. "Imagine— Swirling fog, coming in queer eddies that leave some places clear and others wrapped in mystery. Soft-stepping Chinese, clad in colorful garments, slinking along the street and disappearing down in underground passages! The smell of sea-swept air, and fog, and Oriental incense in one's nostrils. Don't they mingle curiously?"

He didn't wait for answer, but went on.

"And this Christian cathedral, right in the middle of heathendom! It's romantic—marvelous."

"You're hopeless!" Sue shook her head in mock despair. "If you'd lived here in San Francisco all your life, as I have, you wouldn't feel so romantic about Chinatown. Not that I don't love it. I do. But I just can't get any thrill out of it. That's all. I've been here too often in the daytime, when all the native shops are open. You'd like the incense then! Ancient fish, smelling to the heavens, and month-hung meat, and stale air coming out of the dwellings, like some breath from a sealed tomb!"

"That's exactly the reason I won't come down here in the daytime!" Terry Stephens grinned. "I want my romance, and I want it straight!"

Sudden color stained Sue's cheeks. Did he mean anything by that?

"SHALL we go to our usual dining place?" Terry was asking.

The girl shook her head. "That's just the restaurant everybody knows about," she said. "I don't know whether I can find it again, but I had dinner once at a really Chinese place. All the office force went, because our chief had an important Chinese client, and the Chinese are extremely hospitable. One old chap took quite a fancy to me. When I left, he gave me

a card with some Chinese characters inscribed on it, and told me to come again some night. I never did, and that was over a year ago, but Chinamen seldom forget. So if I can find the place I'm sure they'd let us in. Though they don't like sight-seers, as a general thing."

"Have you the card?" asked Terry eagerly.

"Yes. I found it after searching high and low. It's in my purse."

"Then let's go!" Terry caught her arm.

"We go straight down Dupont Street for a couple of blocks, then we turn west and go up Clay Street until we come to a little alley. I think this eating-place is there, as I remember."

"Wonderful!" Terry was all enthusiasm.

She wrinkled her nose at him.

"Ah, now you're making fun of me!" He gave her a little shake. "As if I didn't have a difficult enough time, keeping my youthful ideas of tong wars and hidden underground passages, without you telling me that most Chinese are more American than I am, in dress and speech and even thought! Then you add insult to injury by taking me to that infernally efficient Chinese telephone exchange, where all the operators are saying 'Hello' in Chinese, and acting like regular United States girls, even to chewing gum. My last ideal almost flew away for good, then."

Sue's laugh rippled out.

"That was before I knew what an incurable romanticist you were, Terry, me boy. I'm going to try to make up for that to-night, by guiding you to this typical old-China spot. Won't that atone?"

"Delightfully!"

They were strolling along, stopping every few feet to look in the shop windows where colorful embroideries and sumptuous carved teakwood, beautiful cloisonné and satsuma dishes and vases were cunningly displayed with an eye to enhancing their beauty.

"Gosh! Look at that, will you?" said Terry in a tone of awe.

One of the larger emporiums had an entire window filled to overflowing with an enormous red satin hanging. Down the center was a gold, embroidered dragon with eyes fashioned of flashing amethysts. All along his back were tiny round mirrors that caught that light and reflected it, like a myriad, sparkling, miniature suns. The tail of the dragon was studded with more amethysts. Embroidered smoke belched from his opened jaws.

"That must have taken dozens of Chinese several years to fashion," said Sue. "Everything is hand work, you know. Labor is cheap—and isn't the result gorgeous?"

She stared at the dragon, wondering where she had seen one exactly like it, not so long ago. Suddenly she remembered. She rummaged about in her purse and brought up the paper that had blown against her face.

"Look," she said. "Isn't this exactly like that dragon?"

Terry bent over it.

"Exactly!" he concurred. He ran his fingers over the surface of the paper. "It's even got little bits of purple glass glued on for eyes! The only difference is that there aren't any little mirrors."

"You're right," said Sue. She told him about finding the paper. As she talked, a Chinaman, who had been staring at the dragon in the window, came quite near. She had a glimpse of his parchmentlike face as his slanting eyes looked for a brief second at the paper

she was examining. He was dressed in Chinese garb, a suit of black sateen or some such material, not overly clean. Thick-soled, curved-toed velvet slippers were on his feet. He wore an American black slouch hat of ancient vintage, pulled well down over his forehead.

"That chap was taking a large eyeful of your dragon!" remarked Terry, glancing after the Chinaman as he shuffled on his way.

"Did you notice, too?" Sue put the paper again in her purse. "I'm going to keep this for good luck."

"That's right," commended Terry. "I'll have you believing in Santa Claus along with me, pretty soon."

Sue smiled at him. She couldn't trust herself to speak. If only Terry would be serious for a moment! Then she might know what he really thought of her. But he was always joking and clowning, when he wasn't deep in some new enthusiasm.

HE had come to San Francisco from New York. One day he had wandered into the insurance office where Sue was employed as a stenographer, and for quite awhile had been closeted with Mr. Barnes, the chief. When he came out, he had smiled at Sue.

Sue, usually the most reserved and matter-of-fact young person in the world, somehow found herself smiling back at him. Afterward, she couldn't understand it at all.

When Sue left the office, an hour and a half later, there was Terry waiting at the door.

"Hello," he said in his nice, deep voice. "Californians are noted for their hospitality, aren't they? So you couldn't break the spell, and prove that theory is just a legend with no foundation of truth—could you?"

Sue said, "Of course not," as though it were the most natural thing in the world for her to be talking to him!

"Then won't you show me Chinatown to-night? It isn't so far away, is it? We'll have dinner together and have a great time—"

That was how it had all started.

The first dinner had been over a week ago, now. This was the fourth time Sue had met him in Chinatown, but three other days she had lunched with him down town. She didn't know anything about him, save that he was exceedingly good-looking, with blue eyes that appeared black sometimes when he was intensely excited, a firm chin, a nice mouth, sleek brown hair, and a smile which made Sue's heart thump hideously fast.

He was interested in commercial art, he told her. He had lived all his life in New York. That was all Sue had gleaned concerning him, yet they chattered like old friends every time they were together.

Sue hadn't told her aunt about Terry. Mrs. Briarly was very strict, and she would ask all sorts of embarrassing questions. So Sue met Terry by St. Mary's church on the evenings she dined with him. No one on earth was aware that she knew Terry Stephens. It made the whole thing much more exciting—

They were almost at Clay Street now. The shops weren't so gay and colorful here. American soaps and alarm clocks and garters had a way of finding their way into windows devoted to Cantonese china and gay red and green boxes containing tea.

"How lovely and spooky!" said Terry in delight. Before them was a tray of candied lemon peel and melon candy, and despite her protests, he insisted on stopping to buy some.

"It's not clean," she objected.

"Why not? There was a glass cover over the tray, and the old chap ladled out my purchases with chop sticks! Have one?" He offered her the little paper bag.

Sue took a dainty slice of melon candy, and ate it slowly. "Think I'll try one of these—" Terry was beginning. A hovering Chinese came close.

"You like maybe buy—this?" he suggested in a furtive tone.

Sue gasped. Never before in all the time she had gone down to Chinatown had one of the natives spoken to her. They are a race notorious for minding their own business and keeping to themselves.

This fellow wasn't addressing her, but Terry. He was holding out something in the palm of his yellow hand. She and Terry both peered at it. A ring—that much they made out by the flickering light of the shopkeeper's flare. Terry took it and held it closer to the light.

"It's a scarab," he said. "How queer. It looks as though it might have come from Egypt. But it's mounted in the yellow-gold hammered-filigree style that the Chinese affect."

"Five dollar," grunted the Chinaman with that peculiar slurring "l" sound that the illiterate Chinese somehow manage to get into nearly every word.

Terry unbuttoned his overcoat and dug in his pocket. "Here," he said, handing the man a bill. The Chinaman glided away in the darkness and was gone. But not before Sue had observed something.

"Terry!" she cried. "That was the same man that was looking over my shoulder at the dragon picture! I know, because I noticed he had a queer little scar from his mouth to his chin."

"Hum-m!" commented Terry. "Well, you see your dragon is already bringing you luck! This is a peach of a ring. Odd thing. Unusual. Stick out your finger!"

By chance, Sue extended her left hand. Before she was aware he had slipped the ring on her engagement finger. He didn't seem to notice, but went right on talking. "Hope this ring will bring you good luck, too. Think of me, every time you look at it, will you?"

"Of course," said Sue. Her voice was husky. She was glad the darkness hid her face.

THEY had reached the alley by this time, and turned left. The narrow street was paved in cobble stones. There was but little light. The houses jutted over the tiny strip of sidewalk. Most of the places were dark, but in one was silhouetted a group of Chinese intent on various games. Those nearest the window were deep in the intricacies of mah jongg.

"Here it is!" cried Sue. "I remember those men playing games. A whole year ago, and they look as if they hadn't stirred in all that time!"

"Great!" Terry was enthusiastic. "How do we get in?"

"Through this little narrow door, and up these steep steps. Are—are you sure you want to go?"

Usually Sue wasn't a fearful sort, but now she rather hung back. The stairs were so exceedingly dark! Without knowing exactly why she did so, she turned her scarab ring about, so that only the gold part showed.

"Take my purse!" she said.

Terry slipped it in his pocket—but first Sue took out the card with the cabalistic writing on the back. She kept that in her hand.

"This is marvelous!" Terry's voice sounded jubilant. "Shall I go first? These stairs are too narrow for more than one at a time. If somebody gets me, you can run for help."

He chuckled at the idea, and began to climb. Sue followed, close behind. After what seemed years, and yet could not have been more than two or three minutes, Terry stopped.

"There's a door here," he said in a low tone. "Is this the place? What do I do now?"

"Yes," she answered. "Try the door and see if it opens. After all, this is just a restaurant, you know."

The door swung wide, and Terry entered, with Sue at his heels.

"Oh," she exclaimed. "Oh, we've made a mistake!"

Instead of a restaurant such as she remembered, the room was evidently part of a dwelling. The walls were hung with sumptuous heavy silks of various mellowed hues. At one end of the place was a sleepy-eyed bronze god, life-sized, perched cross-legged upon a throne of red lacquer. Red Coramanta cabinets and tables were everywhere. In front of the shrine was a Chinese lily, blossoming in a bowl filled with water. Next to that was a dish of food, and on the far side rested a sweetmeat box, such as were sold in all the shops. It contained candy and lichee nuts. On either side of the god was a little jar filled with sand—in which were thrust long incense sticks which made the air heavy with a strange odor. The smoke curved upward from the joss sticks in grotesque swirls, meeting and mingling above the head of the bronze god.

All this Sue glimpsed in an instant. But as she and Terry turned to go, a Chinaman glided into the room and bowed low before her, saying something in his native tongue.

"I—I thought this was a restaurant. I'm awfully sorry," said Sue.

"Just a mistake," put in Terry. His eyes were glowing and she guessed that he was delighted with the turn events had taken.

The Chinaman stepped lithely in front of the door, barring their way. Again he loosed a flood of Chinese staccato, singsong sounds.

"What's the trouble here?" A tall Chinaman, clad in American dress, came through the carved doorway which led to an inner room.

"We thought this was a restaurant," stammered Sue. "I was here about a year ago. I thought this was the place. I—"

"It is," said the Chinaman, courteously bowing his head. "I recognize you, Miss North. I have been waiting for you to come. I knew it would be some day. And you have my card in your hand? That is good."

He took it from her limp fingers.

"YOU—you recognized me after all this time?" asked Sue. She was astounded. She couldn't recall him at all.

"Time is relative," answered the Chinaman. "To me, the happenings of a year ago are as yesterday. To the gods," he waved a hand toward the figure at the far end of the room, "ten thousand years is as a minute. To you—a year is endless. That is because you are so young."

He bowed again. Sharply he clapped his hands. The Chinaman who had barred their way took his departure.

"And your friend?" asked the Chinaman.

"This is Mr. Terry Stephens, Mr.—" She paused in some embarrassment.

"Wong will do. Mr. Wong."

"How do you do," said Terry and put out his hand. Mr. Wong shook hands in quite the American manner.

"Won't you be seated?" Mr. Wong was looking at Sue in an odd way. She felt suddenly afraid, although she fought down the sensation.

"I don't think we'd better," she said. "You see, we're looking for a place to eat, and—"

"And you are dining with me!" said Mr. Wong. "Of course you are!"

"But—"

"A year ago I transformed my humble home into a restaurant that my friend, Li Chang, might entertain his friend, Mr. Southerland of the insurance company. This was for but the one night. Do you see? Now I will have the extreme pleasure of being your host at a simple little repast, with my own proper surroundings about."

"We can't impose on you like that, sir," said Terry.

Mr. Wong smiled.

"Perhaps you are afraid that you will have to dine on bird's-nest soup and lizards' tails? Not a bit of it; my cook was trained in a millionaire American's home. You will have the same things to eat that you would have at home. Save perhaps—cooked a trifle better! You can perceive how proud of my chef I am!" He laughed again.

"That would be great," said Terry. "But—"

"Shall I help you off with your coat, Miss North?"

Before she had a chance to say a word, he had taken her wrap. She felt an odd prickling of fear as he touched her hand in drawing off her coat. How silly of her! He was a perfectly Americanized Chinaman, like many she had known. She had never been afraid before; what was the matter with her now?

"I admire your taste, Miss North," Mr. Wong was saying. "I am very fond of this shade of green, and the dark fur is most becoming to you." His fingers stroked the material of the coat as he spoke. "Will you remove the green hat, also?"

"No," she said. "No, thank you." She tried to smile, but her lips felt stiff.

Mr. Wong struck a melodious gong at his side, and almost immediately two servants appeared. They brought over a teakwood table and put it in front of Sue. Like magic, the table was set with an elaborately-embroidered grasscloth covering. Another lily was placed in the center of the table.

"Will you sit here?" Mr. Wong said to Terry, after he had bade Terry lay aside his coat.

IT was a delicious meal. Sue's absurd fear began to be allayed, as course followed course in appetizing array. Mr. Wong was a pleasant host. He told of his college days at the University of California. He chatted of world events.

"You're a regular American, aren't you?" asked Terry. "Do you vote?"

"Indeed, yes. I was born here in San Francisco. But most unfortunately my children are in China. They may not enter this country."

"How's that?" asked Terry.

"My wife was a native of Canton. I went to China to wed her. I stayed there several years, but I found America more to my liking, so returned. My wife died last year." He spoke unemotionally.

"Oh!" Terry looked rather blank.

"In all except my religion, I probably think exactly as you do," said Mr. Wong. "I cling to the faith of my fathers. I find that—"

There was a sudden wild burst of song from a little yellow canary in a red lacquer cage. Mr. Wong got up and threw a dark cloth over the cage, but the bird continued to sing, drowning out his words.

Again Mr. Wong got up. He went over to the cage and opened the door. He grasped the little yellow bird in his long, supple fingers. It fluttered and chirped in fear. Terry and Sue looked on curiously.

As they watched, Mr. Wong gave a sudden, swift movement of those supple fingers of his. There was a queer little sound, then the bird lay limp and dead in his hand. Its neck was broken. Mr. Wong tossed the body back into the cage and went on talking as if he had never been interrupted.

But Sue stumbled to her feet. "I've just remembered," she cried. "I had an engagement at nine, and it's past that now." She pointed with shaking fingers at her wrist watch. "I—I didn't know it was so late."

"My dear, my dear! Did that brute harm you?"

"You Americans are so impetuous," said Mr. Wong. "A moment more or less will not matter. You must eat a sweetmeat before you go."

"I think we'd better leave," said Terry.

For the first time since she had known him, Sue saw that his mouth

was drawn in a straight line, instead of his customary sunny smile. His eyes smoldered furiously, too.

"But you must have a preserved plum before you depart!"

There was a subtle menace underlying Mr. Wong's suave tone. Sue summoned a smile to her trembling lips. She mustn't let Terry speak. He would anger Mr. Wong—and that would never do. They must get out of here. And quickly.

"Thank you," she said, accepting the dainty.

"I don't care for any," said Terry shortly.

"But I *insist,*" said Mr. Wong, very softly. Terry sullenly took a plum.

Sue downed hers quickly. It was filled with some sort of liqueur that burned the throat. Her escort ate his more slowly.

"And now we must go," said Sue. "Thank you very much for your hospitality."

She couldn't get the vision of that limp, dead bird out of her mind. She wanted to run at top speed from this terrible place.

Queerly enough, the incense seemed to be getting much thicker, yet she hadn't noticed Mr. Wong putting any more sticks in front of his shrine. The room was getting gray. She had difficulty breathing. Something was clutching at her throat. Yet no one was near.

She took a step forward—and pitched in a heap on the floor. The last thing she heard was Terry's agonized cry.

WHEN she awoke her tongue felt thick; her head throbbed. "Terry!" she cried, and struggled to a sitting posture. "Terry, let's go away from here."

No one answered. There was a queer, rhythmic sound, like the splashing of water. A strange, whining noise transcended the splashing sound.

She had heard that somewhere before.

"Oh!" she cried, and stumbled to her feet. She looked around. She had just remembered where she had heard that noise. It was the sound of the wind in the rigging of a ship—and she had heard it on the one time she had taken a short sea voyage down the coast.

She swayed where she stood, and stared, horrified, at her surroundings. She was in a tiny cabin of a ship!

There was a porthole, through which she could glimpse the sparkling waves with the sun glinting on them. She had been lying on a small bunk.

Opposite was a door. She dashed over and jerked at the knob. It did not give, despite her frantic efforts. Locked in—on a ship—going—somewhere—

She put her throbbing head against the cool panels of the door and tried to think. What could have happened? She and Terry had gone to Mr. Wong's dwelling. They had eaten dinner. Mr. Wong had been very nice—until the bird sang. Sue shuddered as she remembered.

The plum must have held some potent drug. That was it. She was being shanghaied aboard a ship! But why? She looked down and stifled a cry against the back of her hand.

Sue was clad in a suit of vivid blue pyjamas. That was what she thought at first. Then she observed it was a suit such as Chinese women wear. The blue was thickly embroidered in varicolored silks. It was bound around the edge of the coat with a thick band of black satin.

She rushed to the mirror and looked in. Her hair evidently had been greased. It was pulled back tightly from her face and fashioned into fantastic rolls and coils. On her feet were heelless blue satin slippers embroidered in the same pattern as the suit.

Sue stared at her reflection as if she were gazing at a stranger.

And Terry. Where was Terry? Had they killed him? If they had it was her fault. But how could she have guessed any of the horrible things that would happen?

Terry—Terry.

A rattling at the doorknob made her whirl about, just in time to see Mr. Wong enter. He was no longer dressed like an American. He was clad as befitted a mandarin, in a sumptuous robe.

"Where are you taking me?" gasped Sue. "How—how dare you?"

"You are on the so-good ship *Yang-tze*, China bound," he said slowly. "As to why I dare—that is quite beyond the point. I need not answer you at all. But since it suits my purpose, I will. At that banquet, a year ago, I took a fancy to you. I desired you for my wife, and I never change my mind!"

"Oh!" Sue put her hand against the wall for support.

"I knew that you would come to me, because daily I prayed to the gods of my ancestors. I burned much incense and bought many papers. My faith has been rewarded. I—"

"But—but the government won't allow you to kidnap an American citizen!"

Sue's breath was coming in quick gusts. Her thoughts were like frightened mice, running about in her head.

"And how will the honorable United States find out?" Mr. Wong raised his eyebrows. "Especially since the impetuous young man who accompanied you is, by this time, quite—*dead!*"

"WHAT?" Sue could hardly make her stiff lips form the word. "Dead? Terry!"

She couldn't cry. She felt so deeply that tears could give her no relief. It was as if she, too, had perished. She heard Mr. Wong dimly as he continued to speak. It was as though he were speaking from a long way off.

"I know you must be curious—and rather anxious—about what happened after you—shall we say—fainted? Well, no matter! I will tell you. You were conveyed by my handmaiden into a bedroom and there arrayed in the more befitting apparel in which you are now clad. Then you were taken aboard this ship, placed on the bunk there, and left alone. No one else has seen you until now. Even I, myself, had not glimpsed your fair countenance since you sank unconscious to the floor."

Sue wasn't paying any attention. "Terry," she moaned in bewilderment. "Where is Terry?"

"Two of my men took him into one of the numerous colorful"—he spoke the word ironically—"alleys which has made Chinatown famous," Mr. Wong smiled. "Or shall we say infamous? At any rate, they had their orders. Those orders, of course, will be carried out."

Sue shuddered.

Mr. Wong clapped his hands. A Chinaman appeared instantly, bearing in his hands a headdress, ornately studded with pearls and rubies. Mr. Wong placed this on Sue's head.

"I am sorry such short notice precluded suitable bridal attire for you," he apologized. "But perhaps the headdress will in some measure compen-

sate. And now, if you will come—since the others are waiting?"

"Come?" she repeated wonderingly.

"Every one waits for the bride." He bowed. "The wedding will be quite legal. I did not longer care for my Chinese wife after I met you, so I ordered her slain. I am quite an important personage, you see. I can command anything."

Sue tried to think; tried to protest. But Mr. Wong took her hand and led her into the small cabin of the ship. She swayed, and would have fallen had not the Mongolian put his arm about her and half carried her into the place. She had a blurred impression that the room was crowded with Orientals. A strong smell of incense filled the air.

"Terry!" she shrieked in sudden terror.

Mr. Wong smiled again. "Your Terry knew what was to befall you," he said. "He did not lose consciousness as soon as you, so I informed him that I was about to marry you on the ship *Yang-tze*. He didn't seem so pleased."

"I—don't want—to marry you," cried Sue pitifully.

"That does not matter in the slightest, my pretty bird!" Sue winced. "Nothing can keep you from me!"

JUST then one of the Chinamen stepped forward. With a start of surprise Sue recognized him as the man who had sold Terry the ring. The scar on his face was unmistakable.

The man bowed low before Mr. Wong. "Excellency," he bewailed. "No can do! She bride of Dragon!"

There was a general murmur.

Mr. Wong snatched up her hand and turned the ring about. A buzz of conversation traveled like a great bee over the room.

"Excellency," said the man with the scar. "I let Dragon picture go in wind. It blow against girl's face. She take it. It is the sign. So I sell ring to American and he put on finger. That is all. Who can defy the gods?"

"Who indeed?" Mr. Wong's head sunk on his breast.

Sue hadn't an idea what they were talking about. She was so terrified already that it was impossible for her fear to increase.

"You can never marry me," said Mr. Wong sadly. "You are the bride of the Dragon!"

"What?" Sue stared uncomprehendingly at him.

"Each year the Dragon must have a new bride—an unmarried girl. That is so the Dragon will not grow angry with us and send a pestilence upon our people. The decision is made known by letting fly a white bit of paper—On this paper is painted a picture of the Dragon. When that paper touches the face of a girl, she is affianced to the Dragon. When she puts on the scarab ring she is married to him!"

Sue looked at the ring with glad eyes. She could have kissed it. The ring—Terry's ring—was saving her.

But Mr. Wong's voice rose again. "Inside that ring is a miniature dagger. A bit of deadly poison is on the tip. *The Bride of the Dragon must meet her husband by pricking her hand with that dagger!*"

Mr. Wong waited.

"Open the ring!" he said impatiently. "There is no use delaying. Press the wing of the scarab!"

"No, no!" whispered Sue, shrinking in horror.

"Then I must do it for you!"

He forced the ring from her finger and pressed the scarab wing. It flew open, disclosing the little dagger.

Mr. Wong moved closer to Sue. She could not stir. Terror held her fast. She was going to die. Mr. Wong was going to kill her. She shut her eyes. After all, she would be joining Terry.

The ship gave a great lurch. Something had hit it broadside. Every one was shunted into a heap at one side.

Slowly the ship righted itself. Sue had caught onto the edge of a table in an instinctive effort at self-preservation.

"Oh-ai!" The man with the scar let forth a strange cry. He pointed. "The dragon has spoken!" He prostrated himself on the floor.

Mr. Wong was lying in a grotesquely distorted position. The tiny dagger was deeply embedded in his hand!

"SUE!" called a distracted voice. "Sue! Are you all right? Sue, Sue, my dear! Please answer."

"Terry!" whispered Sue. "It's Terry!" She shrieked his name aloud, again and again.

The next thing she knew she was close in his arms. The kiss she had been dreaming of was making her lips tingle with its sweetness.

"My dear, my dear!" he was murmuring. "I didn't know how much I loved you until I thought I might never see you again. Did that brute harm you?"

"No, Terry." Sue shook her head.

A company of Americans had boarded the ship and were herding the now docile Chinamen into one corner.

"How did you get here, Terry?" She was clinging to him. Tears were streaming down her face. "Mr. Wong said you were dead."

"So I would have been if I hadn't eaten all that Chinese candy before we went to that place! I couldn't swallow any more, so I just pretended to eat his plum—and instead I palmed it rather neatly while he wasn't looking. Then things began to happen. I played dog-go. If I'd tried to rescue you then they'd have killed me on the spot, and then you would have been at their mercy. So I let his two servants carry my limp body into an alley and then—Well, I left them in a pile and dashed after the yacht."

"What yacht?" gasped Sue.

"Why, mine. Didn't I ever tell you? That's how I came to California. Through the Canal, you see."

He folded her closer in his arms and hungrily took another kiss.

"We'll have our honeymoon in this yacht, won't we dear?" he asked.

"Did—did I promise to marry you?" gasped Sue.

"Sure. Don't you remember?"

Terry kissed her again.

And Sue didn't say no!

The Charm Tutor

He taught her how to win men's hearts—and forgot he was a man!

By Muriel Stafford

To his dismay she raised her hand to her forehead—and crumpled in a heap

SHE was very lovely—a misty sweet loveliness that made Dick think of — er — something connected with spring. What was it, now! She raised her big shadowy eyes and said:

"I'll just have cinnamon toast and tea, waiter."

Apple blossoms at home! Sure enough! The waiter looked at her entranced for such a long time that she added:

"That will be all."

He came to earth with a jolt and stiffened to the correct attitude.

"Surely! Yes, miss."

What the deuce had she ordered?

"Snap into it, Dick!" said Sandy at his elbow. "It's almost time to lock up."

"Hey, wait a minute!" He grabbed Sandy's arm. "What 'll I do? I don't know what my customer ordered!"

"Go tell her we're all out of fried scallops," suggested Sandy flippantly.

Dick's face lightened and he went back with an obsequious bow.

"I regret to say, miss, that we cannot fill your order. We have no more oysters!"

She stared at him in bewilderment. How sad her lapis-blue eyes were, for all their black-fringed loveliness! She had been crying, he was sure of it!

"Oysters? I—don't understand. Tea and—and toast. Never mind now, though."

To his dismay she started to rise, and, putting a little hand to her forehead, crumpled in a small and silent heap.

He picked her up with strong arms and carried her to a reception room. There he laid her upon a divan and removed the slippers from her dainty feet, chafing them to restore circulation.

"Sandy!" he called in a frantic whisper. "Sandy!"

"Yeah?"

"Get me some smelling salts or something, quick! Across the street at the drug store!"

Before Sandy came back she stirred and looked up at Dick. "Why—how did I get here?"

"You fainted. You're all right, now," reassured Dick. She lay very still and white with her eyes closed, the inky lashes resting on satin cheeks. Suddenly Dick had a terrible thought. "Say, listen, when did you eat last?"

Her lashes fluttered. "I—I forget."

Dick looked at her keenly. He said: "Just a minute, please. I'll be right back."

When he returned he bore a well-filled tray. "You'd better take some soup first," he suggested, drawing over a small table covered with magazines. He disposed of the magazines swiftly and set the table. Then he helped her to sit up, supporting her back with cushions.

"You are—very good," she said weakly. "Where are my shoes?"

Without a word Dick slipped the shoes onto her feet. He had guessed right. This exquisite girl was famished. She ate everything he put before her as if she had never seen food before.

Finally she leaned back and smiled at him rather shyly. Gosh, she was pretty! He wondered how old she was. About seventeen or eighteen, he thought. Too young to be wandering around alone late at night in the city, anyway.

Sandy came in, distinctly mad. He drew Dick to one side. "Say, you goop, there's no drug store across the street. I had to go four blocks before I found one open. And they didn't have any smelling salts!"

"Oh, that's all right!" said Dick easily. "Thanks, old boy!"

Sandy glared at him for a minute, but as Dick started away he pulled him back and whispered vigorously. Dick shook his head. "Great! Can't, though, I got another engagement. See you later."

He went back to the girl. She had risen and was putting on her hat. At sight of him she said: "I must go. It's very late. May I have my check, please?"

Dick bit his lip perplexedly. If she ordered tea and toast when she was that hungry, she was darn broke! What to do—what to do!

"Just a second!" he answered brightly.

When he returned his face was very grave. "Because of this unfortunate occurrence, the management requests that you consider yourself our—their—guest."

"But it wasn't their fault!" protested the girl.

Dick thought swiftly. "Well—er—I was very slow in filling your order, so they feel somewhat responsible." He beamed upon her, quite proud of his ingenuity.

"Please thank them," said the girl, drawing on her gloves. "And thank

you." She turned toward the door.

"Oh—and they also wish me to see that you reach home all right," he added quickly.

She looked a bit surprised, and replied in her soft, almost childish voice: "You are much too kind. I couldn't think of troubling you to that extent!"

"Not at all! There is a car waiting. I insist!"

Before she could answer he was gone and back again with his topcoat on.

"Where to?" he asked, as they started off in a red roadster.

"I—I don't know!" she answered.

"Well, I'll be dog-goned!" thought Richard Parrish. But aloud he said: "Where are you staying?"

"I just came to-day," she answered, "and I haven't made arrangements for a room yet."

"Where did you leave your baggage?" asked Dick.

"I didn't bring any," she confessed. "You see—I just decided to come and —I came."

Um-m-m. Something funny here.

"Where is your home?"

"Glenmore," she replied, and then added hurriedly: "that is, it used to be."

Dick swung into a wide avenue.

"I'm going to take you home," he announced. "It's only about twenty miles."

"No—no! I don't want to go home! Ever!"

She was crying. Dick drew up beside the curb and stopped. His throat felt tight and queer. Poor kid!

HE waited until her sobs had quieted, and he was sure he had control of his voice, and then he said gently: "I think you'd better tell me about it, and we'll fix things up. Why did you run away?"

"Because I was so miserable," she answered finally.

"But your parents will be worried! Do you think it is fair to them?" demanded Dick with a consciousness of virtue.

"My mother and father are dead. I live with my two sisters." Her voice broke on the last word.

The sisters! They were mean to her! Dick grit his teeth and set his football shoulders. "What did they do to you?" he demanded.

"What do you mean?"

"Your sisters. How did they drive you away?"

"Oh, they are very good to me," she answered quickly. "They give me everything, but—"

"But what?" insisted Dick with deadly calm. She was twisting her handkerchief in agitation. All at once she turned and, lifting her head high, she said clearly:

"You mustn't think terrible things about my sisters. They are kind and clever and very beautiful."

Darn it! She was on the defensive. He'd never help her this way. There was a long silence before Dick had another of his brilliant inspirations.

"Now, listen," he began. "Just think of me as nobody, see? A waiter in a restaurant who'll probably never get a glimpse of your sisters. You couldn't tell any of your intimate friends about it, but you can tell me. I just don't count, and maybe I can help you. We see a lot of—of life in our place."

He was young and clear eyed, and terribly in earnest. Her voice melted as she answered: "You are very good, and it's really nothing that amounts to anything, I suppose. I simply felt so sick—of myself—that I wanted to go as far away as I could."

"Why did you go only twenty miles?"

"I discovered when I got to the station that all I had was four dollars," she admitted. "I had forgotten the money part of it."

Whew! What a babe in the woods she was! All at once she said hurriedly, as if it hurt her to speak. "You see, that's it! I'm so silly! Everybody does things perfectly except me. My sisters are wonderful, and everybody admires them. But I—why, I'm even afraid to talk to people! I don't know what to say."

Dick's heart did a double somersault and sank to his toes.

"You're in love, all right, or it wouldn't bother you so much!" he said glumly.

"No, oh, no! Of course I'm not!" She protested too much. Dick sighed. Whoever the guy was he must be deaf, dumb and blind! Then he remembered the part he must play.

"What you want is to be popular like your sisters, isn't it?" he asked practically.

"I suppose that's it," she admitted after some consideration.

"Are your sisters always telling you that your hair is slipping out, or you have a freckle on your nose, or why do you walk that way, and why do you wear that dress?"

"How do you know?" she gasped in surprise.

Dick nodded wisely and continued: "And then you spend all your time wondering if anybody will notice all the things wrong with you, instead of being nice to every one and having a good time."

"Why, I guess perhaps I do!" she exclaimed, sitting very straight and astonished.

"Now we have it!" cried Richard triumphantly. She was looking at him absorbed, with a flicker of hope.

"You mean—" she began.

"This is what I mean," said Dick, in dead earnestness. "People are just human beings like you, and they're just as anxious to please as you are. All you've got to do is to let them know you think they're interesting and they'll think you are! It's as simple as that!"

"But how can I let them know?" she asked helplessly.

Dick considered. "Well, as soon as you begin to feel the least bit uncomfortable, pick out somebody besides yourself to worry about. First of all, think of the nicest thing you can about him, and tell him. Then find out what he is most interested in, and get him talking about it."

"Oh, I don't believe I could," she protested. "I might sound bold!"

"You won't have to say much except right at first. Just look admiring, and smile as if you liked him." Dick glanced down. Her eyes were wide and thrilled with excitement as those of a child. To his horror he heard himself saying fervently:

"Bold? You couldn't be bold! You are the sweetest, loveliest—oh, darn! I'm going to take you home!"

She was very quiet and thoughtful all the way to Glenmore. Several times she glanced at him sidewise as they sped along. He was saying things like:

"Don't try to copy your sisters. Just be you. You'll find it a lot more fun."

He was very handsome! She wished she dared to begin the game by telling him so. It wouldn't be accurate, anyway, for even his handsomeness wasn't the nicest thing about him.

As they stopped in front of her house she slipped one soft, slim small hand rather hesitantly into his.

"If I only knew how to thank you! I'm sure you're the kindest and the cleverest person in the world!" She came very near and Dick almost forgot to breathe. "I won't be afraid any more," she whispered, "I promise you!"

He lifted her fingers to his lips and thought of apple blossoms again. Then she was gone.

Dick drove back fast in a perfect daze, and burst into his room looking so joyously excited that Sandy sat up in bed.

"I've met the most beautiful, heavenly, exquisite—"

"Save up the adjectives and tell us her name," yawned Sandy.

Dick sat down on the bed suddenly and hard.

"Good Lord! I forgot to ask her!" he gasped.

Sandy shook his head pityingly. "You must 've been in a bad way!" he commented. "Where's she live?"

Dick looked at him tragically.

"Glenmore. I never was there but once before and I didn't notice the name of the street!"

IN Glenmore, a month later, a young woman with all the svelteness and finish of a pictured dress model stood watching her younger sister critically. Fern saw her in the dressing table mirror, and stood up.

"Do you like my dress, Cynthia?"

"Quite good," agreed Cynthia after a moment. "That soft shade of green suits you."

Fern smiled serenely at her image in the glass.

"Whatever has come over you lately, Kitten?" asked Cynthia reflectively. "If it were possible for any one as fly-away as you are to have poise, I'd say you had acquired it."

"What *is* poise?" asked Fern seriously.

Cynthia shrugged. "Oh, I don't know. Being sure of yourself, I suppose."

Fern's eyes grew wide and full of wonder. "Why, of course!" she exclaimed.

Cynthia's eyes narrowed thoughtfully. "I've never seen any one change as mysteriously as you have since that day you went away alone and came back late at night."

Fern was thrilled. "How've I changed. Do tell me!"

"How many bids did you have for this prom to-night?" asked Cynthia abruptly.

"About—let me see—four, I guess."

Cynthia nodded significantly. "If anybody had asked you to go to a dance six weeks ago, you'd have been too startled to answer him, but for the last three weeks you haven't missed any party of importance in this town."

"I know it!" admitted Fern. "Isn't it marvelous?" Then her eyes grew wistful. "Most men are—pretty much alike, aren't they, Cynthia?"

Cynthia looked at her keenly.

"What do you mean by alike?"

"Oh, they all want you to tell them how tall they are, and how strong and how clever, and to look at them adoringly. It's not very romantic—is it?—to have a man fall in love with you just because you've flattered him?"

"It all depends on the man," commented Cynthia dryly.

"That's just it!" agreed Fern.

Cynthia drifted across the room—she never seemed actually to walk—and lifted Fern's glowing face with one slender finger. "Who is he, honey? Vincent? He's certainly in love with you, now, and he's a catch to be proud of!"

Fern shook her head.

"I used to think I'd give anything in the world to have Vincent in love with me, but now I'm not—so—sure."

"Any girl who'd turn down Vincent Welles would be out of her head," Cynthia said shortly.

Fern slipped on a furry wrap and tried to evade her sister's scrutiny.

"Just one more question," persisted Cynthia. "Who's been teaching you this 'line' that's making you so popular?"

Fern dimpled mischievously. "A tutor of charm. I must go, Cynthia. Vincent's waiting."

"Um-hum. But who's the tutor?"

"I don't know his name—he's a waiter. Good night, Cynthia."

The memory of Cynthia's startled face made her own more sparkling and laughing than usual as she greeted Vincent. His admiring eyes confused her a little, and she concentrated on her system of saying the kindest true thing that occurred to her.

"Tall men look so stunning in a tux!" she offered softly. That always seemed to make them happy. He also had a most distinguished and sophisticated manner that used to frighten Fern to speechlessness before she tried this fascinating game.

As they sped along the turnpike she again thought of Cynthia's expression. But probably it didn't make much difference what Cynthia thought. She'd never see him again, anyway, most likely. She sighed, and Vincent's fingers closed over hers.

"Blue, dear?"

She shook her head and smiled at him. If only his dark hair were curly and wind-tossed, and his shoulders broad and athletic looking—oh, well!

"Why should I be blue? What a glorious night it is!"

Vincent's big car swung up to the college hall. "It looks as if the old Alma Mater were popular this evening," he commented.

Fern played her game with success. She could hardly dance around the floor once without being 'cut in.' And yet something was woefully lacking. In her heart there was a little ache—an urge she tried to forget.

"Let's get away for awhile," suggested Vincent. "I'd like to show you the campus of my recent academy."

The scented coolness of the air was refreshing after the stuffy ballroom.

"Here are the weeping willows I told you about," Vincent said when they had strolled far down the broad campus. It was a delightful place. A wide brook swept musically by, and through the drooping branches Fern could see the moon glinting the water with silver.

"How still it is!" she whispered. It was so beautiful it hurt her heart.

"Fern!" exclaimed Vincent suddenly, "there is something I want to say. You know—of course you know—"

He caught her hand. She must stop him—she must!

"Oh, Vincent! I scratched my hand on that silly bush we passed. It hurts, too."

Immediately he was all concern.

"I have a little medical kit in the car. Perhaps we'd better put some iodine on it right away."

"You are so thoughtful, Vincent!" She smiled at him. "I'll wait here."

He hesitated slightly. "Very well. It won't take me a second."

SHE could hear a mandolin tinkling plaintively somewhere on the campus. Some one was singing, too. An inexplicable sadness stole over her. Fern was sure—quite sure,

indeed—that she did not want to marry Vincent. When he came back she would have to tell him so, and he might feel badly. She rose restlessly and strolled along the brook. She could hear the voice distinctly, now. He was singing softly:

"Who is Sylvia,
What is she—"

Fern caught her breath, and parted the branches of a willow tree. The singer rose, and then, as if he were in a trance, he stared at her.

"Why—it is you!" she breathed.

"Are you real?" he asked carefully.

Fern held out her hands to him and smiled, a trembling, quivering smile that came from the urge in her beating heart.

"Oh, I am so glad!" she said. He marveled again at the way her hands seemed to melt into his.

"I have tried every way I could think of to find you! It's been awful! I was sitting here thinking of you!" he exclaimed.

"I tried to find you, too," said Fern. "I went back to the restaurant. Are you working here, now?"

He nodded absently. How beautiful she was in the moonlight! Suddenly he remembered and laughed. "Say, tell me about the campaign. How's it coming?"

Fern smiled a little uncertainly. "I had four bids for this prom," she said.

Dick whistled. "I'm not so bad as a counselor, am I? How do you like being rushed?"

"It's a fascinating game, but—"

"But what?" he demanded. She lifted her lovely eyes and answered hesitantly. "It's not quite—fair—to keep telling people how nice they are till they think you're in love with them, and you're not."

Dick frowned. "No-o. Of course all girls do it, but if you look at it that way I suppose it isn't quite fair."

Her soft lips trembled. "I must go back," she said, "and I really don't know what to do."

"Gee! I'm awfully sorry. Is it some one you've got to turn down?"

She nodded. "I hate to hurt his feelings. He's so very nice, and I can't think of any reason to tell him."

Dick thought long and carefully. He had a wonderful idea, a gorgeous idea, but would she think so?

"Well, of course," he began, "you *could* pretend you were engaged secretly to somebody else."

She shook her head hopelessly. "He knows I'm not, and I never could tell a lie convincingly anyway."

Dick laughed excitedly. "Oh, that's all right! We'll both tell him and have it true!"

She looked so startled that he added quickly: "Why not? It would be all right to pretend for a while, at least, and such a lark!"

Fern kept looking at him, and finally she laughed softly, too.

He had her hands again, her soft, cool hands, and he could not speak. He just looked worshipfully. A clinging tendril of her radiant hair brushed his forehead. "Darling!"

"Well, Fern Jordan, you surely gave me the scare of my life!" It was Vincent. "Whew! I've been searching everywhere, and I had about decided you were kidnaped."

Fern struggled to regain her composure.

"Do forgive me, Vin!" she said. "I just met a friend of mine, and we got talking. In fact—in fact," she went on impetuously, "he and I are engaged. Secretly, you know."

Vincent stared at her, aghast.

"Why, Fern," he managed, "this is quite a surprise! Who is the lucky man?"

Just as Fern was remembering with horror that in her reckless impulse she had forgotten about names again, Vincent exclaimed: "Dick Parrish! Of all things! I haven't seen you in weeks!"

He gripped Dick's hand. "You're both pretty lucky, I'll say!" he exclaimed huskily.

"Do you know each other?" cried Fern in astonishment.

"Know each other? We were roommates at Prep School, and we're fraternity brothers as well," said Vincent. "Well, Fern, if it had to be this way, you've picked a darn good man!" He looked from one to the other. "I suppose you're waiting until Dick graduates in June to announce your engagement?"

"Er—what—oh, yes!" agreed Fern hurriedly. What was he talking about! What had she done now!

"Awfully glad to see you, Vin," Dick was saying, "and thank you for your congratulations. By the way, would you mind if I drove Fern home? I haven't seen her in some time, you understand?"

Vincent bowed to the inevitable. "Well, I'll fade away then. Best of luck, both of you! Good night."

"Gosh, he's a good sport!" exclaimed Dick fervently. "I think I'd just about kill anybody that took you away from me like that!"

Fern was silent for a long time. Finally she said slowly, lifting her eyes to look at him:

"You're not a waiter at all?"

"No, honey, I would have told you, only Vin came before I had a chance to do much explaining."

"Then what were you doing in the restaurant?"

"That's one of the Parrish restaurants, you see. Dad said our fraternity could take over the local place for a day, and use the proceeds toward our athletic fund. He thought it would be good experience for me. Gee, it was the greatest experience I ever had!" he concluded impulsively.

Fern Jordan gathered her wrap around her. Firmly she told him: "Quick! That changes everything! We must find Vincent and tell him it's all a joke."

"A joke! It's no joke to me!" He caught her arm and turned her around. "Do you love Vincent, Fern?" he asked, a little doubtfully.

She shook her head lingeringly, but she would not look at him.

"You love me, don't you?" he pleaded.

She was still gazing across the water, and the moonlight glinted on her lowered lashes.

"Sweetest heart, the game I told you about a month ago was all right in its way, but this one will be perfect! Let's play it to the finish!"

Fern smiled tremulously. He was so dear, so very precious. She was glad he was a college student instead of a waiter. She touched his face again with a tentative finger, and he gathered her into his arms. The girl shivered with sudden joy, holding up to him warm red lips in a gesture of complete surrender.

"Gosh, honey!" cried Dick earnestly, when he stopped kissing her to breathe, "this is no game at all. It's real!"

"As real as forever, murmured a small, breathless voice that somehow couldn't steady itself. Because the next minute his lips had found hers again, and all the world was lost in a rush of ecstasy.

The Night Club Mystery

Barry Cabot learns a secret he must never tell his sweetheart

By Elizabeth Jordan

Author of "Miss Nobody from Nowhere," "Black Butterflies," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS AT A GLANCE

BARRY CABOT, an orphan, was reared by Aunt Marcia in the village of Wheaton, Massachusetts. He had been given a fishing rod on his ninth birthday, but was disconsolate because his aunt would not let him go alone to Swift River, and no one was available to accompany him.

A stranger, J. C. Bleecker of New York, visiting Wheaton on business, agreed to

Go gle

take the boy fishing. They spent such a delightful day that, although Barry did not see the man again for fourteen years, he idolized Mr. Bleecker for the remainder of his childhood.

Living next door to the Cabots were Mrs. Anne Perry and her niece, Janet, three years younger than Barry, her playmate. Janet's mother was dead, and the child knew nothing of her father except that he was an engineer in South America whom she had never seen, but who kept her supplied with money.

Between the two motherless children a warm friendship developed. When they grew up, however, Barry went to Harvard and Janet was sent to a fashionable finishing school. Later they drifted apart, Janet embarking upon a musical career and young Cabot traveling abroad and later obtaining a position in a bank in New York City.

Their correspondence had died out. The two had not met in three years, when Barry accidentally discovered Janet living in the same apartment house with him, taking vocal lessons and occasionally giving "whoopee" parties.

Barry, conservative and methodical, disapproved of the latter. He dropped in on one of her parties to learn what she was doing, and took her whole "gang" to the Cockcrow Night Club for an evening's revelry.

Meanwhile, J. C. Bleecker had turned up again—as a depositor at Barry's bank—now known as Brian Strong. A bank official, Ward Howson, warned Barry that Strong was a gambler, associating with underworld characters.

Indeed, the night Barry went to the Cockcrow he learned that his boyhood idol was there also, and was playing for heavy stakes in a little room, from which, as the night advanced, emanated sounds of quarreling and then two revolver shots.

A dying man staggered out of the room, paused in front of Barry and Janet, then reeled through a narrow corridor to a rear exit, followed by a gunman later identified as Tony Bosco, "Tony the Cat." Then the lights went out.

Barry rose to meet the startled newcomer

Barry and Janet fled through the same exit and boarded a taxicab. The Cat slipped into the same cab and stayed there until he was safely out of the neighborhood.

The victim, Dan Skelly, died without naming his assailant, but the underworld picked upon Strong as the scapegoat. Strong got in touch with Barry, advising

him not to come forward with his testimony except in an extreme emergency, and was arrested. Barry was determined to keep out of the case, if possible, as it would jeopardize his position at the bank.

Janet declared she was "cured." She forswore night clubs and gave up her "gang." Barry was delighted with her new attitude toward life and, for the first time in their long years of friendship, admitted his love for Janet and offered to marry her. But he was worried about Brian Strong, so his declaration of love was too casual to please the girl.

The following day Janet and her aunt moved away suddenly, not even giving Barry her address. He learned later that she was devoting all her time to music, but could not locate her.

A mutual friend, Colonel Jessup, tried to interest him in Nancy Howson, but without success. Barry made a long, futile search for Janet.

"Big Jim" Bosco, the Cat's brother, attempted to intimidate the young man into silence, but he retorted with a defiant letter. Barry wrote also to "Ten Grand" Mantell, Strong's pal, telling him about Bosco's threats and saying he was ready now to testify for Strong.

CHAPTER XXII

"BIG JIM" BOSCO never replied to Barry's note. Mantell responded at once and rather surprisingly:

DEAR CABOT:

Strong, to whom I showed your letter, when I went to see him to-day—no doubt you know that I'm out on bail myself—has been positive from the first that you'd come across as you have done. But, notwithstanding all I could say to him, he refuses to let you act for him at present. He still hopes that some miracle will make it unnecessary for you to appear in his case at all.

The only course for you is to respect his wishes and sit pretty. There's no question in my mind that sooner or later he'll have to call on you. He asks you to forget him till he utters a hoot for help.

Gratefully yours,

DAVID MANTELL.

Barry dropped the letter on his writing table with a sigh of relief.

He saw his path very straight before him. Without waiting for that "hoot for help" which he, too, now realized would come, he must resign his post at the bank. He must enter the witness chair not as an assistant manager of an important branch of Alfred E. Howson's bank, but as a young man without a job and with no business prospects that could be affected by his actions.

Having thus cast off his professional connections, he could stand by Strong to the limit, whatever the limit was. After the resignation, not before it, he would explain the situation to Nicholas Jessup. The disapproval of Jessup's old friend, Howson, would not sadden him, but the prospect of his interview with Jessup hurt.

He was becoming very fond of the colonel, and it was plain enough that the man's affection for and dependence on his protégé were constantly increasing. Jessup made no effort to conceal his deep satisfaction over Barry's return to the simple life. He regarded the boy, if not as a brand plucked from the burning, at least as a scorched child who had learned to keep away from the fire. Occasionally his content found relief in words he vainly tried to make casual.

"Ever see the Perry girl now?" he asked Barry. The latter was dining with him the night of the day Mantell's letter came.

Barry frowned. He did not like the way the question was put.

"I haven't seen Miss Perry since she moved," he said stiffly, "and I don't know any more about her than I did then. But I intend to start in now and make a mighty thorough search for her."

The words startled the old colonel out of his comfortable sense of well-being. He set down the glass of port he had been sipping and straightened in his chair with the manner of one going into action.

"How do you know she really wants you to find her?"

"I don't know that," Barry admitted. "Perhaps she doesn't. But I believe she's having a mighty lonely time, and I ought to be standing by."

"Didn't you tell me a few months ago that you didn't care for the girl?"

"I think I said I wasn't sure then just how I felt," the young man explained. "I admit that Janet gave me so many jolts the first months we went about together that I didn't want to be too much interested. I fought against my feeling for her. The fight was pure selfishness. I didn't want the trouble I saw ahead, if I let myself go. That's the naked truth of it. But lately I've felt differently. For one thing, I understand why Jan got out of the way. She saw how I was backing and filling, and the exhibition sickened her. It would have sickened any girl. It makes me sick now myself to think of it."

He stopped, but the old man did not speak.

"She got out to make it easier for me," Barry repeated; "but getting out made things a lot harder for her. She has turned her back forever on her wild oats—I'm sure of that. Wherever she is, I know she's leading a quiet, self-respecting life. She never went too far, you know—" He spoke with such conviction that the hearer checked a remark he had been about to make. "I'll stake anything on that. From start to finish her dip into the night life here was due to loneliness and idleness and curiosity. Even before the Skelly murder I could see that she was getting fed up, and that finished her cure. She went away to work and to put herself back into her proper place in life, and I'm sure she's doing it. But it's a hard job, and I ought to be helping her. Perhaps I'm boring you with all this," he added self-consciously. "But a crisis has come in my affairs, and I'm afraid I'll have to do a lot of things you won't approve of."

Jessup drew a deep sigh—the sigh of depressed acceptance with which seasoned age takes the vagaries of youth.

"I suppose all this means that you're going to marry Miss Perry," he brought out at last. She had become "Miss Perry" in view of that prospect, and Barry appreciated the change.

"I certainly am, sir, if she'll have me. I suppose if she had stuck to the white lights I'd have tried to forget her. I might have had to. Perhaps we'd have driven each other crazy inside of a year. Now it's different. She has as much loathing for her old haunts as I have—"

"She may get over that, you know," Jessup suggested as they entered the library.

"She won't. She's had a shock that opened her eyes. But, of course," Barry added absently, "I can tell just where she stands as soon as I see her again."

He had spoken more to himself than to his companion, and he did not realize the full significance of his words till Nicholas Jessup broke into a high cackle of laughter.

"In other words," he crowed, "you've given her four months to reform, and you won't commit yourself till you're sure she's done it. Great head, my boy! But where's the passion that made the lads of my day act first and think afterwards?"

"I never was impulsive," he said.

"I rather hoped you'd take to Nancy Howson," the host admitted as he accepted a *demi-tasse*.

"I know you did, and Nancy and I are the best of friends. But she's going to marry Ward Howson the first of June, and I'm to be best man—that is, I was," he corrected—and then bit his lips over the slip.

His host looked up.

"Lots of things may happen between now and June," Barry murmured uneasily.

"Brian Strong's trial among them?"

Barry nodded, and for a time they smoked in silence. At last Jessup asked testily:

"How about it? Do you think you may be drawn into the trial?"

"I'm sure of it." The young man pulled himself up to the announcement he had been trying to make. "I'm so sure of it that I handed my resignation to Ward Howson to-day. That's what I meant by saying that my affairs have come to a crisis."

Jessup started as if some one had struck him. He put down his cigar with a hand that trembled.

"I had to do it," Barry hurried on. "Please don't say anything, colonel. I'm sure to be called as a witness, and it's only decent to let the bank be clear of me before I'm pulled into the mire."

He told the old man at last the full story of Tony the Cat, and added his recent experiences—his talk with Mantell, the trailers on his path, his visit to Bosco and its sequel.

The old fellow uttered a half cackle, but it was clear that the revelations alarmed him.

"I suppose the sealed envelope in my safe holds one of those Bosco documents," he muttered. "To whom did you send the other one?"

"To Ned Wheeler, a classmate. His father is Horace Wheeler, publisher of the *Searchlight*, you know. I've had two talks with him—and he'll stand by. To-day I gave the whole story to Strong's lawyers. They'll spring it as a surprise at the trial—and until then, of course, there won't be any publicity."

At last the old man brought out what seemed to him the most important phase of the whole matter.

"Surely you realize that your life is actually in danger?"

"Don't worry about that. I'm in pretty good condition, and I'll be on my guard every minute."

CHAPTER XXIII

TWO nights later Barry had an unexpected caller. He found himself looking into the pale gray eyes of Mrs. Perry, whose whole expression testified that after a life of obedience to the will of others, she was now prepared to register independence and to make a good job of it.

His heart leaped. He sprang forward, almost overturning a chair in his eagerness to welcome her. She was startled and relieved by the warmth of his reception.

"I wasn't sure you'd see me," she confessed, taking the chair he drew closer to the fire, as the spring night was cool. "That's why I didn't send up my name."

He was bending to put a floor cushion under her feet, and he interrupted this act of hospitality to stare up at her.

"Not see you, Aunt Anne! For heaven's sake, why wouldn't I see you?"

Mrs. Perry leaned back in the big chair and loosened her coat.

"Well, for one reason," she murmured, "because Janet has acted very badly."

He misunderstood her, as of course he would do in the present raw state of his nerves. She had come to ask his help in getting Janet out of some new scrape she was in.

"What has Janet done?" he asked at last.

"You know perfectly well what she's done. Going away with all that mystery and never sending you her address! It was a shocking performance, and I told her so again and again."

"Oh—*that!*" Barry turned and looked up at her with shining eyes. His visitor's expression changed. She stared at him with an odd look of dismay.

"Then she was right," she muttered. "She said you wouldn't care—and you don't."

"You're all wrong about that, Mrs. Perry." The young man spoke very quietly. "I care a whole lot. I spent the first six weeks after Janet left trying to find her in every way I knew how. I looked up some of her gang, went to Jake's night club, even advertised. Nothing came of it, and I stopped. I was just getting ready to start another campaign."

"Then I'm glad I came. You're a nice boy, Barry. That's why, when I realized that trouble was facing Janet, I found the courage to come to you without letting her know."

"Trouble? What kind of trouble?" The host's apprehension had returned. "She told me in her letter," he added in a low voice, "that she was going to settle down."

"She has settled down. She's been wonderful. I'm so glad to be able to tell you that."

For a moment the new theme roused his caller to animation, even to enthusiasm. Her face flushed excitedly.

"Janet has been marvelous." She gushed on with the effervescence of a geyser. "She has dropped all her old crowd and practiced her singing three hours a day and read a lot. She and I have been going together to concerts and theaters. Those things, and an occasional lunch or tea at some restaurant or hotel have been our only amusements, and we didn't have meals out very often. We didn't dare to go to the best places, either, because Janet was afraid of meeting some of the old set."

The listener knew she had not yet come to the real object of her visit, but that account of a reformed Janet was talk that ravished his ears. He listened avidly.

"You'd be surprised to hear Janet sing," Mrs. Perry went on. "She sings charmingly now. Her voice has that lovely rich quality it used to have. Vaselli says she'll never have enough volume for opera, but that she will develop into a good *lieder* singer for drawing-rooms and small concert halls."

The woman's voice had flatted a trifle. Her thoughts were now on her coming confidence, but she had not yet found the right words to begin it. Barry offered a cue.

"You said she was in trouble of some sort?"

"Yes, she is. We both are."

"If it's anything about money," said Barry, "you must let me help you out, as a lifelong friend and neighbor. You know I can do it easily, and I'll be mighty glad of the chance."

His right hand lay on an arm of his chair, and the visitor turned abruptly to put hers over it.

"You *are* a good boy," she repeated. "But it isn't money. Janet's father has just sent her a year's allowance in advance, and that ought to last us two years or longer, the way we're living now. Of course, Janet's change of life has cut our expenses enormously. Personally I could get along on almost nothing," she sighed. "So could Janet, if she had to. Neither of us cared much for the luxuries we had been having. You'd be surprised to see how simply we live now. No," she repeated drearily, "it isn't money. It's something much worse. It's a tragedy."

"Tell me about it," Barry invited, and those who considered young Cabot "up stage" in manner would have been surprised now by his voice and the look in his vivid blue eyes.

"I'm going to." She took up her confidence with the quick breath of one who goes at a task to get it over. "You've heard Janet speak of her father's friend, Mr. Haven?" she asked with a direct look at Barry.

"Often. I understand he's the New York representative of Mr. Perry's firm and looks after his interest here, including his daughter."

"Yes, he has done that since Janet was a baby. He has been wonderfully kind—and most generous, too. No matter how much her father sent her here in New York, Janet was always running behind her allowance. You know how she was squandering money last year," she interpolated, and her companion nodded. "Mr. Haven always advanced any amount she wanted," Mrs. Perry went on. "He said those were her father's orders, and that all he had to do was to send her father the receipt Janet gave him and get his money back by the next mail. Then afterward he'd show us her father's return checks to make us feel easy."

"I suppose," the young man broke in between his teeth, "he's taking advantage of that now—hinting that she's under obligations to him. Is that it?"

"Not at all." Mrs. Perry spoke with sudden sharpness. "He's not that type, and Janet *is* under obligations to him. We both are—for years of friendship and kindness. He's been the only friend we could turn to—the only real friend we had, except you. He wouldn't take advantage of us in a thousand years," she rushed on. "But—he's in trouble just now."

"What sort of trouble?"

Mrs. Perry's voice sank almost to a whisper.

"He's been indicted for murder. His trial is coming very soon."

"Mrs. Perry, do you mean—by any chance—Brian Strong?"

"Yes."

For a moment neither spoke. Then Mrs. Perry went on: "It seems that he's a gambler, and that he uses several names. Haven is only one of them. Instead of being a successful business man, as we had always supposed, he's the friend of blacklegs and cut-throats and thieves. Janet and I were both overwhelmed by that. At first we simply could not believe it."

She spoke with a passion that surprised the listener, clasping and unclasping her thin hands with increasing nervousness.

"Perhaps Janet's father didn't know any more about that than you and Janet did," Barry said. "And Haven—Strong, I mean—seems to have met his trust faithfully, so far as you and Janet were concerned."

He felt the urge to defend, to explain, to talk. But Mrs. Perry interrupted.

"Yes, that's the whole point. He's been wonderful to us. Simply wonder-

ful. And while he has deceived us—terribly—and the discovery of what he is has given us both an appalling shock, I think—in fact, I'm *sure*—that we ought to stand by him."

"How? In what way?"

"I think we ought to go to see him."

The district attorney checked her sharply

"And get back into the newspapers? Mrs. Perry, you mustn't even suggest such a thing! It would mean nothing to Strong and it would be utterly disastrous for you and Janet. Can't you see that? You've just been rejoicing because Janet was out of the limelight, and you were right. One visit to Strong would offset the effect of all those quiet months. Janet would have the worst kind of publicity. The newspapers would rehash the story of her club life here and the fact that she was at the Cockcrow the night of Skelly's murder—"

Mrs. Perry drew a sigh that ended in a groan.

"Just the same," she brought out wearily, "I think she ought to go to see him."

"But why—for God's sake, *why?*"

"Because if she doesn't," Mrs. Perry muttered, "she'll seem the most ungrateful little beast on earth."

"Then let her seem ungrateful."

With a gesture of desperation Barry Cabot thrust both hands into his shining black hair, which stood up on end under the outrage. He was in for a contest with that most difficult of all antagonists, the stubborn meek.

"Let her seem ungrateful," he hotly repeated. "A young girl's reputation is something that can't be trifled with, and Janet played fast and loose with hers for months. Now she's begun to guard it. For God's sake, don't push her back into the mire that she's managed to crawl out of. Frankly, Mrs. Perry, to save my soul, I can't under-

stand why you want her to do such a thing. To me it seems morbid."

"I want her to do it because it's her duty."

Barry's lips parted, but now his visitor's expression withered speech. There was a meaning in those faded eyes before which he sat silent, struggling with a sense of combined consternation, fury and helplessness.

To remain sitting beside this woman was impossible. He got up, walked over to the mantelpiece and, resting an elbow on it, stared blackly into the fire.

"If you make Janet go to the Tombs to see Strong," he finally brought out, "you'll be throwing her to the wolves. And Strong would be the last man to thank you for doing it."

"No, I don't suppose he would thank me," Mrs. Perry admitted, "but Janet owes it to him just the same."

Suddenly her face twisted grotesquely, and her voice took on the note of rising hysteria.

"She broke his heart the last time he saw her," the woman brought out wildly. "It was the very day he was arrested, but he sent for us to come to his office and he did all he could for us before he went to prison. And she broke his heart. I heard her doing it."

Standing straight in front of his caller, Barry looked down at her till she raised her eyes.

"Mrs. Perry," he said very gently, "are you telling me that Brian Strong is in love with Janet?"

"No, no! Good God, *no!*"

"Then"—he moved a step nearer, still holding those faded, frightened eyes. "Are you telling me that Brian Strong is Janet's father?"

The woman before him sank into a huddled mass. Head in trembling hands, shaking shoulders bent low, Anne Perry gave way to the tears she had held back up till now. Barry returned to his position by the mantel.

"So that's it," he brought out. He must give Mrs. Perry time to finish her outburst.

"Janet's father and your brother?" he said at last. "Or brother-in-law?"

"Brother. We both used the name of Perry."

"And you never knew what he was? Why did you think he was concealing his identity from Janet all these years?"

"I knew there was something. He always told me he wasn't good enough for Janet. He said he was a kind of a promoter without any business standing. He said she'd never have a social position or make a good marriage if folks knew he was her father. He made up the legend of a father in South America when she was a baby, and I kept my mouth shut. I had to. He made me. We were both dependent on him and he is the most generous man alive. Besides, he simply adores Janet. She doesn't suspect it, but I've never seen such devotion. And to have her attack him as she did that last day—when she told him what she thought of her father— Can't you see the tragedy of that?"

Her wet eyes begged for his understanding. For a moment she wept again, this time more quietly. Then she went on:

"Naturally, neither Janet nor I ever dreamed he was a gambler or associated with criminals. I simply thought he was in some business he wasn't proud of. These last years I've been sure he was a big bootlegger. I've read so much about them, and about how much money they make, you know."

She wiped her eyes and sniffed depressedly. The truth was out and her storm of feeling was over.

"She broke his heart the last time she saw him—the very day he was arrested," she repeated. "She told him she despised her father and that she was sure he was no good. I heard it all—and saw his face— It was terrible!"

At the memory she seemed about to collapse again. But Barry had taken time to think.

"You've come to the right person, Mrs. Perry," he said simply. "I happen to know your brother. I was going to the Tombs to see him very soon. I'm pulling wires for that now. As it happens, I'm to be witness for him at his trial. I'll see him to-morrow, if I can. I'll tell him how you feel and then we'll all have to do what he says. I'll bring you back his answer—his exact words. By the way," he broke off to ask—"does Janet suspect that he's her father?"

"Suspect *that!* I should say not! And she thinks her father doesn't dream of his real character. She thinks her father was deceived by Mr. Haven just as we were."

"All right. See that she doesn't learn any more. Give me your address and I'll report to you as soon as I've seen Strong."

She gave him the address and Barry made a note of it. Then he escorted her downstairs and out of the house and found a taxicab for her. Seated in it she looked at him helplessly as he stood hatless at the cab door.

"He was such a good brother, Barry," she moaned.

"He'll always be a good brother," Barry asserted. With a mighty effort he had pulled himself together and now he smiled at her encouragingly. "He'll be acquitted, you know."

She shook her head.

"The newspapers say he won't," she murmured with the layman's vast faith in the authority of printed words. "But he's been a wonderful brother and the kindest boy and man I ever knew. He was always doing kind things."

Barry knew that. As he mounted the stairs with slow steps he saw again the mental picture that was becoming an obsession with him of late—the river—the willows—the man—the ecstatic small boy with a fishing rod.

Brian Strong's sister had no need to tell *him* that Brian Strong was kind.

CHAPTER XXIV

"I HAD to see you when you sent me a thing like this, and you must have used a lot of pull to get in here. But I don't mind saying that I'm rather disgruntled over your coming. That's against the bargain, you know."

Sitting on the side of his cell cot Brian Strong flicked a finger at the penciled note he held. The torn envelope from which he had taken it lay at his feet.

"'I've got to see you about Janet,'" he read aloud. "All right, boy. Just what does it mean?"

Barry, seated opposite him on a small stool, his knees touching his companion's, was shocked by the change in Strong's face. In four months the man had aged years. Barry broke the silence.

"Mrs. Perry came to see me last night."

Strong looked at him with raised eyebrows.

"Mrs. Perry?"

"Yes."

Barry went on: "You know—or perhaps you don't—that I've known the Perrys since Janet and I were kids. We lived side by side in Wheaton."

"I ought to know that," Strong said quietly. "It was the day I came to Wheaton to inspect and buy a house for them that you and I had our little fishing excursion."

"It was for *that?* But you never came back," Barry reminded him after a pause to take this in.

"No, I passed that way but once. It was ideal for them, but not quite my *milieu*. And, of course," Strong hastened to add, "having made sure they were comfortably settled there was no special reason why I should go back. I suppose Mrs. Perry told you," he went on easily, "that I represent Janet's father in business matters concerning Mrs. and Miss Perry."

"Yes, she told me that—and more."

Strong seemed not to hear the last two words.

"I visited Janet at her different schools," he went on, "and I took her and Mrs. Perry to Boston and New York for occasional outings. But I never felt drawn back to Wheaton."

"Janet was always talking about Mr. Haven," Barry reflected aloud, "but naturally I never connected—I didn't connect you with their coming to Wheaton, either, though I remember now that they came only a month or so after that day—and the name—"

Strong nodded.

"I used the name of Bleecker in my business with the realty people. And I rushed the Perrys into the house as soon as it could be put into condition for them. Janet's father wanted her brought up in the country," he elaborated. With no change of tone he went on casually:

"What did you mean by saying that Mrs. Perry told you of our business relations—and more?"

"Because she told me a good deal more."

Barry had a gratifying habit of keeping to the straight line of any discussion. He rarely sidestepped a direct question.

"She was very much excited and upset," he went on. "She showed that she was in great trouble about you. She felt that Janet ought to stand by you, and she came to ask my advice about it."

Brian Strong uttered the first bitter words Barry had ever heard from his lips.

"When a hen-brained woman begins to think after a lifetime of neglecting the art," he muttered, "she gums up the whole works. How the devil could that girl stand by me? I hope you gave her your advice," he added urgently.

"I did. Perhaps I gave it too strongly. Anyway it made her feel that she had to tell me the exact situation."

"Just what *did* the amiable woman tell you, Cabot?"

Strong asked the question quietly, without looking at the visitor.

"She said you were Janet's father, and her brother."

Strong nodded again.

"Has she told that to Janet?" he asked in a low voice.

"No, and I'm sure she hasn't told any one else. She didn't mean to tell me, but one thing led to another. I guessed the truth and put the question to her straight."

Strong rose, moved to the door of his cell and stood with his back to it, facing his visitor.

"Frankly," he said, "I'd rather Anne—my poor sister—had kept her mouth shut. But since Janet doesn't know—and never will know—perhaps no harm is done. I want you to make clear to Anne—to Mrs. Perry—that if she tells Janet I'll never forgive her,

and she'll know I mean it. I've spent the last twenty years keeping the truth from that girl and it's been a devilish hard job. I've gone to an infernal lot of trouble to do it. I'm not going to have all that work go for nothing."

"I thought you would feel that way, but I wanted to make sure. Mrs. Perry thinks Janet ought to come here and see you."

Brian Strong came to Barry's side and held his glance with hot and resentful eyes.

"Is there no limit to the woman's idiocy?"

"She says Janet hurt her feelings by criticizing her father during your last interview—"

Strong waved that away.

"You tell my sister," he said, emphasizing every word, "that if she lets Janet know I'm her father, or brings Janet here or into court to see me, I'll never forgive her. I think that will muzzle her," he added more quietly. "She knows I'm a man of my word."

He sat down on the cot and took his white head in his hands.

"But why this infernal business has to come up now," he groaned, "with everything else—"

"It's over. You needn't give it another thought. Janet will never know. But while I'm here, Mr. Strong, I want to tell you something else." Barry went on resolutely. "I love Janet. I'm not sure she cares for me, but if she does I want to marry her."

He stopped, and caught his breath. Strong had literally flung himself forward and was clutching the speaker's shoulders in shaking hands. It was overwhelming to see the man's usual poise so utterly upset.

"You mean that?" Strong gasped.

"Of course, I mean it."

"Then nothing else matters," said Strong, and turned a transformed face to his visitor. "It was in the wild hope that you and Jan might get together that I selected that apartment for her in your building."

"You selected it? You knew I was there?"

"You bet I did. I've been watching you for years. After all, you and Jan had been brought up together and I hoped that seeing each other again—But my poor girl had been doing her best to ruin her chances. I realized that. However, even the friendship of a chap like you was bound to help her. I didn't know how you'd develop humanly, but after I met you, I was sure that at least you'd stand by Janet, if she needed a friend. And there was always the chance—a slim one I knew—that you two might fall in love. But, Barry," his voice changed and his hand fell again on the young man's knee, "in decency I oughtn't to let you do this thing. Janet's mother was a fine woman—as good as they come. But if Jan ever learns the truth—or if others learn who she is—well, you see what I mean. Looked at from your standpoint, I'm a pretty bad lot."

"Looked at from my standpoint, you're nothing of the sort. You know what I've thought of you all my life. You've seemed—well, you've took the place of the father I never had. I'm going to try mighty hard to be a son to you now," Barry explained simply. It was a time when one could say a thing like that.

"Of course," he added, "I've got to remind you that so far as she is concerned, I'm still in the air. She's gone out of her way to avoid me. She may not want me. But my mind's made up. I'll move heaven and earth to get her."

"She'll take you, all right," Brian

She smiled at Mr. Strong

Strong said, and added under his breath, "What girl wouldn't?"

He had the look of a man from whose shoulders a crushing weight had been lifted.

"And now I want to tell you something more."

Barry told of his resignation from the bank, of his visit to Jim Bosco, and then to Strong's lawyers, and of his recent trailers.

"You need a bodyguard," Strong told him.

"I rather flatter myself I've proved that I don't," Barry mentioned.

"Better let me decide. The Bosco gang doesn't fight in the open and you don't know much about their methods. I'll put Dink, my handy man, on the job."

"I wish you wouldn't," Barry said with set lips.

Strong took his hand.

"My boy," he said with great seriousness, "if I'm acquitted I'll come to your private wedding as Mr. Haven and after that I'll disappear from Janet's life for good. In a few months she'll get a cable from South America announcing her father's death. You two must make your new start without any undesirable aliens in your world."

"But — good Lord — that's all wrong!" Barry broke in hotly.

"That is the way it's going to be, my boy," Strong assured him.

And as they shook hands in parting Barry knew it would be exactly that way, despite any arguments he himself could bring to bear.

CHAPTER XXV

IT was Barry's last day at the bank—he had begged to be relieved at the earliest possible moment—and he had an interesting farewell interview with young Howson.

"Of course, you know you're a blasted fool," his overwrought superior assured him. "Why don't you work all this infernal Damon and Pythias stuff out of your system in a natural way? Run amuck for a few days or weeks. Have a fling and make it as hectic as you like. Find a few baby dolls and play with them. Go to some prize fights. I know one newspaper chap who went to a big prize fight every time he began to have Galahad inhibitions. It always cured him—stirred up his nervous system and gave him something worth while to think about. Confound it, Barry," he broke out, "you and I could have done a lot here. You'd have done the work and I'd have got the credit and we'd both have been happy."

There was no resemblance to Uncle Alfred in young Howson to-day. He was all polo player and good friend.

"Get out while the getting's good,"

he cried at last. "If you sit there any longer I'll be sobbing on your shoulder."

After banking hours that day Barry called at the uptown address Mrs. Perry had given him. The house was a well-kept building on a good side street, but the luxurious atmosphere of the former home was missing. The caller found Mrs. Perry alone and, as she put it, "half frantic."

"Janet's gone out," she began breathlessly. "It's the mercy of heaven that she is. I don't know what she would do to me if she knew I told you where we lived."

"She'll never know," Barry promised. "There are a lot of things Janet will never know. I'll make her think I got the address some other way. Now I have something to tell you."

He described his visit to Strong and saw her face whiten during the repetition of her brother's threat.

"He meant it, too," Barry emphasized.

"You needn't tell me *that,*" she groaned. "I guess I know my own brother."

Partly to divert her mind Barry included the confession of his love for Janet—it was a time for cards on the table—and her haggard face brightened.

"I'll go back to Wheaton to live," she said longingly. "I know everybody and there's a dear little white cottage on our old street that I can buy for almost nothing. I've had my eye on it for years. I saved enough of what my brother gave me to buy it, and my husband left me enough to live in it very simply."

When Janet came in the two were placidly having tea together. Barry rose to meet the startled newcomer as casually as if they had never parted.

He looked wistfully at her

"It took more than four months to do it, but I've reached your lair," he boasted as they shook hands. "Which will you have, toast or muffins? And the strawberry jam is great."

He bustled about, waiting on her, ignoring her silence and the tears in her eyes. She finally pulled herself together.

"I'd like to know how you—" she began.

"That's the dark secret I'm going to carry into our married life," he affably assured her. "And by the way, Jan," he went on coolly, offering his cup to Mrs. Perry for more tea, "it may interest you to know that our married life will begin just outside of Boston. I've resigned from the bank and I'm going to take my shining talents back to New England where I belong. Aunt Anne's going to Wheaton. How about a June wedding?"

He bit into his third muffin.

"Nice month, don't you think?"

"You seemed to have settled everything," Janet remarked.

Barry shook his head.

"Not everything," he reproached her. "Of course, I've got to be sure that you love me before I lead you to the altar."

He swallowed the last of the muffin.

"I suppose this is as good a time as any to find out," he added thoughtfully, and drew his chair close to Janet's. There was a little rustle and a sound of retreating footsteps. Mrs. Perry, tactful as ever, was seeking the seclusion of her room.

It was not until an hour later that Janet Perry recalled a matter that had been much in her mind of late.

"Barry," she began urgently, "you've got to back me in something big."

She related their discovery that "Mr. Haven" was Brian Strong.

"You know what a wonderful friend he's been to me all my life," she went on. "I've simply got to stand by him, though I don't need to tell you how I dread doing it. It's been such rapture to keep out of the bright lights that at first I couldn't face more notoriety by going to see him. But now—"

"He'd hate it," Barry firmly assured her.

"You *think* so?"

"I'm sure of it. If you went to see him you'd add the last turn to the screw."

Realizing from the surprise in her face that he had put the case rather too strongly he caught himself up.

"Any decent man would feel that way about having a nice girl come to see him in a Tombs cell," he ended.

There was a long argument, which drew from him the recital of his visit to Strong and the story of J. C. Bleecker.

At the end of it Janet sighed.

"Perhaps you're right," she agreed at last. "I always thought you were right about everything, even when you were a little boy."

"I'm not, usually," her lover unexpectedly admitted. "But you can take it from me that I'm right about the wife I've picked out."

He kissed her again with the zest of a man who, having given up everything else he values for a friend and the love of a woman, is finding the renunciation worth while.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE trial of Brian Strong for the murder of Daniel Skelly was as sensational as the newspapers had predicted. From the day of its beginning public interest in it came up like a rising tide.

The superb fight made by Strong and his lawyers against an acknowledged band of criminals and gunmen aroused sympathy, and the difference between the prisoner's witnesses and the men who were trying to swear away his life was marked enough to impress every spectator in the overcrowded court room.

But the gunmen had been well coached. Thin-lipped, furtive eyes, laconic, they gave their testimony without apparent animus and in the fewest possible words, and every word counted.

Even Max Steinhall, most able cross-examiner among New York's criminal lawyers, could do nothing to discredit their testimony, except to bring out their prison records.

He also made the most of the law's failure to produce Big Jim Bosco in

court, as the district attorney had promised to do. Both the brothers had disappeared, for reasons Mr. Steinhall was sure he understood and which he also suggested to the jury during that final summing up.

But before this point was reached an amazing pageant of human beings—thugs, gunmen, gamblers, waiters, racketeers, and Broadway rounders, had crossed the court room to enter the witness chair and testify for or against Brian Strong.

There were plenty of witnesses against Strong who were not gunmen. Two waiters at the Cockcrow testified that during his outburst at the end of the game, Skelly's verbal attack on Strong had been as vitriolic as his language to Big Jim Bosco—and that they, the witnesses, had left the room at that point and refused to reënter it, fearing trouble.

They were meek and diffident men on the stand, seeming anxious only to do their duty, and speaking highly of Strong as a generous patron of the club.

Steinhall did his best with them, but all he could bring out was the palliating evidence that Skelly's abuse of Strong had poured forth when the latter was trying to act as peacemaker. They had no memory whatever of the presence of Tony Bosco in the club on the night of the murder.

"And they served him half a dozen drinks," Mantell mentioned to Barry, who sat with him in the court room.

The defense had three surprises for the prosecution and the public, and produced them with fine dramatic effect.

The first was the evidence of young Barry Cabot, former employee in a leading bank, who had resigned his position, Steinhall brought out, that he might give testimony for an innocent man, regardless of its effect on his own professional career.

Barry had writhed over this playing up of his evidence, but Steinhall had been firm.

"It will go over big," he had solemnly asseverated, and indeed it proved so interesting that the district attorney started his cross-examination with an indirect attack.

"Mr. Cabot," he asked suavely, "I'm right, am I not, in my impression that you have known the gambler Strong all your life, though under various names?"

"I met the defendant once in my boyhood. I was nine years old." Brian smiled. "I never saw him again till a few months ago. I have met him exactly five times in all."

"Confine yourself to the question, please," the lawyer snapped, while Steinhall grinned triumphantly.

To his testimony as to the events in the Cockcrow and the presence of Tony Bosco there and in the cab, Barry added the account of his trailers, his visit to Big Jim Bosco and the threats made by Bosco.

"Were you and the man Bosco alone in that cab, Mr. Cabot?" the district attorney inquired.

"The driver was with us, and another passenger."

"Who was it?"

"A lady."

The contented Steinhall rose to his feet.

"If my distinguished colleague will permit an interruption," he began, "I would like to save him trouble by explaining that this lady herself is present and that later she will testify in this case. As she is to take the stand so soon—"

The two lawyers wrangled until the

judge suppressed them. Steinhall sat down happily and listened with respectful attention to the rest of the cross-examination. He had shot his bolt and got his effect, just as he had overcome the absurd scruples of Strong and

"We're starting a brand new life together"

Cabot, both of whom had acted as if a girl could be ruined for life by one brief session on the witness stand.

Lounging back in his chair with his hands in his pockets, Steinhall told himself again that the girl was a pippin. At a crisis when the case seemed

definitely against Strong, she had gone to Steinhall's office, had told him of her presence in the club and the cab, and had quietly announced her fixed and final determination to testify for the gambler.

From this decision neither Barry's arguments nor Strong's frantic appeals from his cell could move her. The man who had driven the cab that night could not be found. Barry's testimony, strong as it was, was the statement of but one person. She could verify it and she would do so.

In the meantime, here was young Cabot, knocking off a link of Strong's fetters, Steinhall was sure, with every word he uttered, and after him came the defense's second surprise for the prosecution.

Recognizing this witness, Barry learned at last where Hennessy had got his information. It was the un-

emotional head waiter of the Cockcrow who took the stand after him and who quietly testified that he was approaching Mr. Cabot's table the night of the shooting, that two shots rang out as he did so, and that standing just behind Mr. Cabot's chair he had seen Daniel Skelly reel out, wounded, into the facing corridor, and had also seen the younger Bosco, known as "Tony the Cat," emerge from the same room immediately behind Skelly. Tony Bosco, he also testified, had been in Skelly's room all evening.

The district attorney did his best, but nothing could shake the effectiveness of this evidence. With a fine eye to cumulative effect, Steinhall called Janet Perry as his next witness.

Quietly and skillfully he drew from Miss Perry first the story of what she had seen the night of the murder—her brief view of Skelly, and her short ride with Tony Bosco—and next her reasons for appearing in a sensational case with which, of course, she would prefer not to be identified.

She and the aunt with whom she lived had known Mr. Strong since her own childhood. He was a lifelong friend of her father—a civil engineer in South America. She had met Mr. Strong on an average of four or five times a year ever since childhood. She had known nothing of his private life. She had supposed him to be a business man. He had been her adviser and her best friend.

She had decided to tell what she knew about the Skelly case in the hope that it would help him, though—yes—(like Barry she resented having this point brought out) though it might hurt her professional and social standing.

In her testimony Janet professed great admiration and respect for Mr. Strong. He was the kindest, the most thoughtful, the gentlest natured man she had ever known. That he could commit a murder was incredible. He was the sort who would risk his life to save another.

The district attorney checked her sharply, but Steinhall gave her a later chance to get in her conviction that Brian Strong was the type who would give his life for a friend.

As she came down from the stand she smiled at Mr. Strong. The gambler forced his stiff lips to smile back. He looked wistfully at her. Mantell dropped his eyes, and Barry marveled. Truly, Brian Strong was a man who kept his own counsel! Neither his best friend nor his lawyer knew who Janet Perry was.

The final witnesses for the defense, David Mantell and Brian Strong himself, described the mounting tensity of the fatal scene in Skelly's room, and told of the presence of the two Boscos.

Strong had seen no shot fired. He had seen no weapon in any man's hand. Quietly and effectively he described the tableau on which he had looked as he turned from the table in the corner. His testimony as to his interpretation of the expression of the two Bosco faces was objected to, as the defense had realized it would be, but Steinhall's coaching had been so careful that Strong easily got it in.

Both lawyers wore themselves out over their summing up. The judge's charge to the jury was dispassionate and logical. It was half past three in the afternoon when the jury left the court room to consider the verdict.

Brian Strong was led down to the prison pen to go alone through his ordeal of waiting. He was supposed to have finished with lawyers now, and the great City of New York allows its

waiting prisoners no such solace, at this time, as the presence of relatives or friends. Strong went away with his guards.

Outside of the building throbbed the beating pulse of the mighty city. Offices closed and office employees went home. Shadows filled the corners and crept toward the waiting men and women restlessly milling there. A little later lights flashed on.

Mantell reminisced about Strong, and his companion was interested. He changed the subject and Barry ceased to hear him.

"Think it would be safe to go out and get a bite?" Mantell asked at last.

"I couldn't swallow anything."

Mantell sighed.

"That goes for me, too—but perhaps we ought to try."

"Boy," Mantell said later, "you've got to talk a while. I'm all in. What are you going to do, after the trial is over?"

"The first thing I'm going to do is to marry Miss Perry," Cabot replied. "I suppose you know that."

"I suspected it. Congratulations. Charming girl, and she's been a trump to come out for Brian as she did. Going back into banking?"

"My friend, Colonel Jessup, has promised to get me a job in Boston with a trust company he's interested in."

Mantell returned to the only subject on which he could keep his mind.

"You've done a lot for Strong, my boy. If he gets off, he'll owe it largely to you. All I could do was to lend him a little money."

Mantell had lent Strong, the listener knew, all he had. If Strong were acquitted the two gamblers would have to begin a new life, in a new environment. But that would not greatly disturb either of them. They were soldiers of fortune.

Mantell and Barry took another brief turn in the street, bought some sandwiches and carried them back to the Criminal Courts building in a paper bag.

"What's become of Dink?" Barry asked.

"Don't know." Mantell looked around. "Saw him on the White Street side little while ago. He'll turn up. If Strong doesn't get off," Mantell added dispassionately, "Dink will kill Tony Bosco."

Nine o'clock, ten o'clock, eleven o'clock. The corridors were stifling. Both men were looking at their watches at close intervals. Mantell was bucking up, plainly feeling that the ordeal was almost over. Barry felt himself near collapse. He wanted Janet—oh, so very much!

Then at last he heard a voice:

"Jury's comin' up!"

Barry gulped. Mantell slipped an arm through his and rushed him into the court room.

Barry was never quite sure just what happened from that time until the jury and the prisoner stood face to face. He was vaguely conscious of the repeated rush of spectators into the court room, of the scramble for seats, of the subdued voice of the clerk of the court, of the judge, of a sudden and absolute silence that settled over the crowded room, of a voice cutting into the utter stillness.

"Not guilty!"

Then a roar, a forward surge of massed and excited human beings, the fierce pounding of a gavel.

Brian Strong, with hands in those of Steinhall and Mantell, was nodding over their shoulders at Barry.

"Steady's the word, old chap," he

smiled, looking at the boy's twitching features. Janet had come in, too, and her face was radiant.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THREE months later, seated on an old stone bench in the walled garden of their new Massachusetts home, Barry Cabot turned to his bride, wiped her eyes and resolutely addressed her.

"And now you've really got to stop crying, my darling," he told her. "After all, you see, it isn't as if you had known your father."

Young Mrs. Cabot permitted her eyes to be wiped and made an effort to be calm.

"The news came so suddenly," she said, looking at the yellow message that lay between them. "What I'm really crying about, Barry," she went on after a short silence, "is because I'm not as unhappy over my father's death as I ought to be. But it breaks the last of my old ties. When Mr. Haven—Mr. Strong, I mean—went to Europe, I realized from his manner that we'd see no more of him. Now that Aunt Anne is happy in her own home and my father is dead, I feel as if all my old life had fallen away from me. That's a queer, sickening, lonesome feeling, Barry."

"I know it is."

Her husband slipped an arm around her and drew her close to his side.

"But after all," he pointed out, "we're starting a brand new life, and we're starting it together. That's something, isn't it?"

"That's everything!"

Janet Cabot spoke with a little catch in her breath, like that of a child whose spasm of grief is over.

THE END

If We Were Free

IF you were free and I were free
I wonder what our hearts would say;
I wonder if my eyes would see
The beauty they find now in you.
And would my lips then crave to stray
To yours for kisses as they do—
If you were free and I were free?

—*Irene Handley Beard*

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As many answers will be given on these pages as space permits. All other questions will be answered by mail. A stamped, addressed envelope must accompany your request for analysis.

Girls' clubs or organizations may secure Mr. Fraser's services for an evening's lecture by addressing him care this magazine.

"THERE are none so blind as they who will not see," may be an old saying, but one which is very applicable to those in love. It matters little whether you are a man or a woman, when real love gets you in its grip, peace of mind, constructive thinking and common sense fade out of the picture.

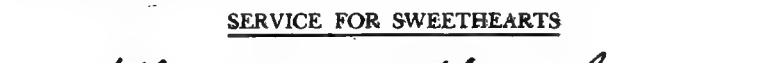
You can be the smartest and most efficient little girl in the office, school, or factory, the most prudent and sagacious young man on the staff; but give either of you an eyeful of some one who appeals to you, and the boss can start right away and mark down your efficiency value fifty per cent.

However, it is nothing to get pan-

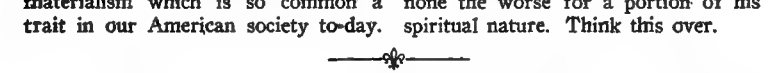
icky over! Nothing new. As a matter of fact, the world owes a great deal to its gay Lotharios and charming Dulcineas for their laughter and good cheer. A scientist said the other day that human nature was made up of optimists, pessimists and cynics; quite so, and Cupid's Enlistment Bureau always will be responsible for the great army of optimists who scatter sunshine wherever they go.

Now for this week's sweethearts:

SERVICE FOR SWEETHEARTS

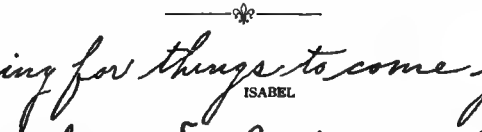


(Miss C. L. H., Wichita, Kans.) I'm sorry, Catherine, that I will not be able to answer very many of your straightforward questions in the short space allotted to me here. An anxious inquirer like yourself deserves a whole page, since your problems are the same as those that come to every girl who is looking forward with keen anticipation to the future. For the present, I must confine myself to those which concern your welfare and your romance with Dick. Regarding your fiancé's nature and disposition, I'm afraid you do not understand him very well, even though you have been chums since college days. Did you ever stop to consider that this boy belongs to the strongly idealistic type, who care little or nothing for the gross materialism which is so common a trait in our American society to-day. He is far more interested in things of the mind and spirit than in the things of the body. I would imagine he would derive much more enjoyment from the perusal of a good book than he would from the most exciting game in the World's Series. You, on the other hand, seek your pleasure from the tangible and transient things in life. A good show, a night on a ballroom floor, or a permanent wave is quite enough to fill your little horizon with sunshine. The fact of the matter is, you're a lightweight compared to him. You resemble the butterfly, while he is the busy bee. Of course, there is no reason in the world why you two young folk should not be extremely happy. Dick is all the better for having your carefree temperament, while you would be none the worse for a portion of his spiritual nature. Think this over.



(Miss M. F., Lexington, Ky.) Your letter with comments about your boy friend was very interesting. It is evident you two young people have many

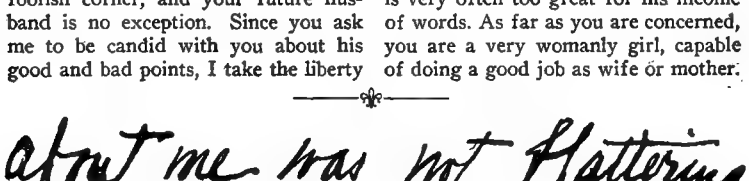
things in common, and in consequence ought to team up very satisfactorily. You have both come from clean and honorable parents, and your education has been well taken care of. These foundation stones of character are of the utmost importance to every young life, but we all require something more than parentage and culture in the matrimonial field, toward which, I understand, you're heading. For example, your tempers have to be considered. Are they fiery or easy going? What about your will power. Is it strong or wobbly? Are you opinionated or passive? These and many other characteristics have all to be taken into account before the wedding march is played. By having these samples before me, you have given me a splendid opportunity to answer these questions. Regarding the first—your tempers—I would say that you have the more temper of the two. It's a "I-want-my-own-way" sort of mood. In other words, pure childishness. Joe's nature, on the other hand, has more of the quiet vindictiveness about it. Something like the old woman's parrot—not much of a talker, but a devil to think. When it comes to opinions, he has got it all over you. Being a well-read sort of fellow, he feels justified in expressing his convictions, since you are not given to much heavy thinking. Despite these biases in your natures, however, I see no reason why you should not be an ideal married couple.



(Miss I. Y., Utica, N. Y.) The reason for your "periodical tiffs" is plain and evident to me, after analyzing your sweetheart's handwriting and then comparing it with your own. I don't doubt for a moment that Sam looks well, and has had a good upbringing, as you explain in your letter, but there are many other qualities required besides those you've mentioned before a young man can be considered a desirable mate for any girl. And your Sam is no exception to the rule. Let me tell you why I think you are not very well mated. Sam has been cursed with a very self-confident and domineering nature. Now you ought to know that an overbearing demeanor is no passport to human hearts. It is more apt to repel people than draw them to you. Then again, he shows a tendency to be flirtatious. I'm sure you don't approve of that. Sam would always be ready and willing to set his cap for any member of the opposite sex who might happen along. I would call him a rather sporty, fun-loving youth. You, on the other hand, have a charm all your own. There is nothing coarse or objectionable about you. You have sane and sensible ways of looking at things. Your strong idealism places you in a class by yourself. You share in none of the gross materialism which unfortunately is Sam's meat and drink. He cares a great deal for the flesh pots. Before it is too late, you would be well advised to consider

the disparity in your individual natures. You are far too young anyway to think of getting married. A girl with your talents and education should be giving her attention to more serious matters and to study, rather than wasting her time at mixed parties, as you say you're doing.

(Miss R. E., Albany, N. Y.) I see no reason in the world why you and Eddie should not be happy. I have discovered from an analysis of his handwriting that he is a real "he-man," a fellow who has a heart big enough to more than take care of a little girl like you. In my opinion, your fiancé is cast in a large mold, and as a result he is destined to accomplish many worthwhile things in his life time. Of course, like all healthy red-blooded men, he is inclined to go off at a tangent and make foolish mistakes once in a while, but this is where your womanly prudence will be necessary. Even in the mind of a sage we occasionally find a foolish corner, and your future husband is no exception. Since you ask me to be candid with you about his good and bad points, I take the liberty of telling you that he is no angel. Though he is fond of you, he is also rather fond of himself. When you get married never forget that Eddie is the "head of the house." As soon as he crosses the threshold, he will expect you to remember that he is monarch of all he surveys. The more rope you give him, in this direction, the more he will love and respect you. He is also talkative, as doubtless you are aware, with leanings toward egotism. If you can break him from this habit by some deft method of your own, you are justified in patting yourself on the back, for I'm afraid that Eddie belongs to that class of men whose expenditure of speech is very often too great for his income of words. As far as you are concerned, you are a very womanly girl, capable of doing a good job as wife or mother.



(Miss W. T., Gloucester, Mass.) Your letter interested me, particularly the part where you denounce us poor "mere men." Since I'm one of the tribe to which Charlie belongs, in defending him I will be able to give my own personal views of manhood in general. Some wiseacre once said, that "if women only knew how much worse men could be, how much more they would love us." While an old bachelor in the nineteenth century

wrote: "A man often thinks a woman is an angel before he knows her. When he does know her—well—he knows—'er—better." Now, what do *you* know about that? In my opinion, Charlie may not be a man with fine talents, but I'm sure he is making the best out of what he has. Don't forget that the best man in the world is only a man at the best, and though "your fellow," as you call him, has not got the wisdom of a Solomon, or the vivacity of a Douglas Fairbanks, still he has got a great deal more than you give him credit for. Try deliberately to appreciate him. I grant you that he is very "shifty," and undependable at times. He would even go the length of being deceitful with you. But then again I notice that he is a man who loves peace at any price, and your domineering and blustering ways may be the reason for his chronic alibi-ing. To turn the searchlight on to yourself for a moment, your whole penmanship spells of mannishness. I don't envy Charlie for a minute. If I were in his shoes, I'm afraid I would adopt the "absent treatment" cure, and give you a wide berth. I am sorry to have to say all this, but since my object in conducting this department is to give to my correspondents the unvarnished truth about their problems, I make no apology for what I have told you. "Honesty is the best policy," all the time.

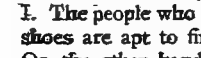
have received reports
ALICE
and I am very much
JIM

(Miss A. T. J., Pontiac, Mich.) After close examination of both samples of handwriting you send me, my answer is: I have seldom seen a man and woman engaged to be married to each other who have so many characteristics in common. You have both been blessed with sound minds in sound bodies. You both have a lot of sentimentality in your natures. You are both very impatient, and get irritable when things are not done as quickly as they might be. You are both great talkers, and—I hate to say it—both somewhat opinionative. I must say you are a well-matched pair, but with such an equality of traits, who is to be the boss in your little love nest? I am aware of the fact, that in *real* homes there are no bosses. In real homes two bears are always to be found—Bear and Forbear. In real homes the husband and wife play a game of "give and take" more often than they play a game of cards. Whether yours is to be one of those model anchorages, I just "ha'e ma doots." And my reason for saying this is, neither you nor Jim have very much of the "bear and forbear" spirit in your natures. It is true he may give in to your whims and foibles during these courting days, but what about those months and years after the honeymoon? With such keenness of intellect on both sides, there are sure to be many matrimonial tilts. I would ask you to think this over, Alice, before it is too late. If you are both willing to submit to each other, all is well, but the trouble is, so many married couples resemble hyenas as they get older, and

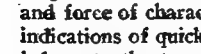
get stiff in the neck. I hope this won't happen in your case.

YOUR CAREER

(Miss O. T., Miami, Fla.) By your pointed pen-strokes, I can see at once that you are suited for the legal profession. Your power of judgment and penetration is remarkable. Your faculty for reasoning is something to be reckoned with, and your memory is not the least of your characteristics. There is one thing, however, which is not so commendable, that is your self-importance. You seem to be carried away with yourself. Before you go any farther it would be well for you to learn that few men or women are important in this world, and certainly no one is necessary—not even you or I. The people who get too big for their shoes are apt to finish up barefooted. On the other hand, you have a great "gift of the gab." Your fluency with the English language is very pronounced, and your intuition is somewhat uncanny. You should not hesitate to go into this field. Your personality and force of character alone are ample indications of quick advancement. You belong to the type of woman who is known as "wise as serpents, and as harmless as doves." In your case, however, the dove-like propensity is scarcely noticeable. A little cultivation of meekness would do you no harm.



(Miss G. P., Newark, N. J.) I gather from the size of your pen-strokes that you have well-trained faculties, and also the ability of concentrating on one thing to the exclusion of everything else. I'm sure you are sufficiently well educated to fill the position of private secretary. Although you are still comparatively young, I have no hesitation in saying that the responsibilities of such a job are not too great for you. From your youngest days I believe you have been a seeker after knowledge. You must have learned while still in your teens the value to be derived from the possession of a certain amount of information, and you equipp' l yourself accordingly. As a matter of fact, you have gone beyond that, for by the formation of your "e's" I notice signs of real culture. Your memory is another of your outstanding traits, and your discretion has already got the mark of maturity about it. Since you have made up your mind to get into the commercial field, I see no reason why you should not be some big executive's "right-hand man."



(Miss B. D., Richmond, Va.) You have such a warm, genial nature I can readily see what line of business you could profitably enter. Coupled with your education and culture, there is no gainsaying the fact that you are cut out for a teacher. Yes, I would say, even more than that. With your leadership qualities you could easily rise to be a director of some private school. I observe by your pen-strokes that you are a born school-ma'am. Your one strong desire is, I'm sure, to spend and be spent in the service of little children. The young mind has a peculiar fascination for you. Its gradual development is a never-ending source of

wonder to you. Then again, your retentive memory is another splendid asset for your success in this profession. Your work would be individualistic. Attention to the most minute details in a boy or girl's progress would be absolutely necessary to you. Last but not least you impress me as a cautious girl. You would always think twice before you spoke once. Self-control is the foundation stone of every strong character. I see great possiblities in you. Get busy right away.

They told me

(Miss A. M. M., Pasadena, Calif.) There is no getting away from the fact that you are specially endowed with artistic tastes and have great inherent artistic ability. The kind of ability you possess can be easily capitalized. I would say that interior decorating is your forte. Your excellent taste, coupled with your mental refinement, qualifies you at once for this work. From your pen-strokes I see that you are one of those candid, straightforward girls who is never afraid to speak her mind. This is a distinct asset if you are to engage in this class of business. You must have the courage of your convictions, and be able to say what's what when a contract is handed to you. And the beauty of it all is, that though you have that forcefulness of character you can still be diplomatic, willing and ready to listen to the likes and dislikes of your customer. Your sagacity in this direction is very pronounced, and will stand you in good stead when you enter on a business career. I notice one weak point in your nature which if not corrected might prove detrimental to you. It is your desire to procrastinate. Remember the old adage, "Never put off till to-morrow the thing that should be done to-day."

Girls' clubs and organizations can secure the services of John Fraser by writing to him care of this magazine. An evening's entertainment and instruction of surpassing interest is provided by Mr. Fraser's analyses.

If you belong to a club suggest to the other members that they set aside a meeting to be addressed by Mr. Fraser. Vocational problems of the members can be solved by having this expert in graphology analyze handwriting specimens. Simply address him care ALL-STORY, 280 Broadway, New York City.

JOHN FRASER,
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway,
New York City.

This coupon is not good after November 2. A stamped addressed envelope must be enclosed when forwarding.

I enclose handwriting specimen for
—Service for Sweethearts.
—Your Career.
(Check which you prefer.)

Name.....

Street and No. .....

City..... State.....

Heart-to-Heart

Tell Your Love Troubles to

AGNES
MERION
MORTON

MRS. MORTON wants you to feel that she is a friend—some one to whom it is a comfort to tell your problems, who will advise and encourage you in your struggle for happiness, and who is always here to help. She is interested in you. Write to her freely.

Every letter is confidential.

As Mrs. Morton receives so many letters, she cannot publish answers to all in the space allotted to her. Some, therefore, are answered by mail. Be sure to enclose a stamped, addressed envelope with your question.

The mail seems to run in cycles. One morning almost every letter on my desk will be about a broken engagement; another day a large proportion will concern the problem of mixed marriages. This morning there are several which deal with that matter of jealousy. The Jealous Wife, the Jealous Husband, the Jealous Sweetheart, and the Jealous Friend—what trouble and sorrow they make for themselves and those who love them! And the worst of it is, it's all so unnecessary.

Dear Mrs. Morton:

Sometimes I think I am the most miserable woman in the world. I have been married twelve years and have three lovely children, but I've always been of a very jealous disposition. So far as I know, my husband has never given me any real cause. He seems fond of the children and of me, and is always doing nice things around the house.

Lately it has been worse. I had an operation some months ago that left me lame. I can still get around and do most of the work (I have help twice a week), but I tire easily, now, and cannot go out evenings. Sometimes my husband does not come home to dinner because he works late, and he likes to go to lodge some nights. And when he's out I just about go wild, for I keep wondering if the excuse he gave me is the truth, and then after he comes home I lie awake and wonder and suffer.

We have had words lately, too, a

thing we never did before in all our married life. He told me the other day I'm getting to be a terrible nagger —" And I never expected it of you." 'And it seems to me he stays out more than ever, and is gladder to get away.

How can I find out if he is true to me, Mrs. Morton? What can I do to be sure?

Edna Bartelle.

There is no touchstone I can give you that will prove his fidelity—and even if there were, should you continue to harbor jealous thoughts the doubt would return again and again. But if you will only try to help yourself *in the right way,* we can find some light for you.

The operation was, of course, a shock to your whole nervous system, and that is why it has been especially hard lately. But you should be recovering from those nervous effects now. I want you to gather all this precious energy and time you are wasting in worry, and use them constructively. Determine to master your jealousy instead of letting it master you. And the very best way—the only way—to do that is to crowd it out of your mind with other things.

When your husband is out, don't sit and fret, but put your mind on some sort of pleasant work for him or for your children. To be concrete, a cross-stitched rug might be the very thing! They come in beautiful patterns for children's rooms, with ships or hunting scenes or nursery pictures of all kinds on them. Get one as intricate and difficult as possible, and work it in gay colors. The physical exertion would not be too much for you, and you would have to think every minute of what you were doing.

Also, don't let yourself get too tired. Take a certain time every day for a rest hour, and let nothing interfere with that rest. Lie down and train yourself to relax utterly. Let every muscle go—down to the tips of your fingers, down to the tips of your toes. And as you lie there, when the unwelcome thoughts come, push them away. If you can do it by no other method, try repeating to yourself over and over, like a lesson: "He is true to me—he is good to me—I love him, and Love means faith and trust and unselfishness. I'll let him live his own life—it's normal for a man to want outside associations — but I'll make home so pleasant that he'll be glad to be here with us, too. He loves us—he is good to us."

If it is hard just at first, make yourself as comfortable as you can, and read instead of doing nothing. Books are invaluable aids to divert the mind and relieve it of its cares.

Give your husband the benefit of the doubt. He sounds like a pretty good sort to me, and you certainly don't want to drive him, by your unreasonableness, to do the very thing you fear. Don't let him have occasion again to accuse you of always nagging. In fact, I am very sure that in a few months or weeks—perhaps weeks—you won't know what it is to have a jealous thought.

Write to me again if I can help you, and, meanwhile try—try—try to help yourself. My hopes are with you. I'm betting on you, Mrs. Bartelle!

Dear Mrs. Morton:

My letter is going to be about a girl instead of, as is customary, about a boy. We moved here in the late spring, so I am still a new girl in town, you see. This girl sat in front of me in school, and she was very kind to me;

showed me things and had me to her house, et cetera. We are the same age —sixteen. We went together quite a lot, and I like her, but this summer I've been getting acquainted with other people, and Katharine (that's her name) has been making a terrible fuss about it and cries all the time, and now she says I've got to choose between her and the rest. She says she can't share me with other people. "That's the way I'm made, and I can't help it." The other girls tell me she's always like that—so jealous.

I don't want to break with her, Mrs. Morton. She was good to me when I didn't know any one else. But do you think it's right for two girls to go together all the time and not have other friends too?

Elsa M.

No, Elsa, I think it neither right nor wholesome for any two people to devote themselves entirely to each other. Katharine will never be happy if she is going to be as exacting as that all her life. The next time she tells you she "can't help it," why don't you ask her, very gently, if she ever tries to help it? If she can't appreciate other people as well as yourself? Let her think it over for awhile, and then ask her to your home some evening with two or three other girls. Tell her they are coming, "and we'd all like to have you, too." Let her attitude determine your future relations. If she won't make the effort to conquer her unfortunate disposition, you might better let her go now, for you could never depend on her friendship anyway.

Dear Mrs. Morton:

I suppose you'll think I'm old enough to act for myself when I tell you I'm nearly thirty, but I'm terribly muddled in my mind, and just must talk it out with some one.

I have a boy friend, and he is a boy friend in every way, for he's only twenty-two, but in spite of that he has the mind of a man. He's lots older in his ways and thoughts than others of his age, and when I met him a year ago I knew right away I'd met my fate. My friends all laugh at me and call me a cradle snatcher, but I can't help feeling we were made for each other. I think at first he only liked my looks, for I am considered rather beautiful, with dark hair and eyes, and a very fair skin. He is tall and blond, with great big shoulders that look strong enough to carry me through everything. Dear Mrs. Morton, I really do love him—more than any young flapper could do. I know he's only a boy compared to me, but what can you do when the for-life-and-death love strikes you like this? He is everything I have ever wanted—not much money, but I don't care for that, as I would be glad to go on working. I'd die for him, but then I think it would be better to live. He will have a fine position after he graduates, but he is determined to marry me now. I don't know how his parents will feel about me, for we've kept it awfully secret so far. Won't you tell me what you really think? Please help me if you can.

Troubled Lydia.

Dear child, for that's what you really are, don't you know that in these days there's no such thing as age? Look around you! What has become of the grandmothers and mothers of a past day? Few of them remain. The grandmother of to-day sometimes wears short skirts and is bobbed. And as for the mothers, often you have to look hard before you can tell her from

her flapper daughter. Don't *think* yourself old. That's the secret. Ignore age, and age will ignore you. As for his parents, the youth of to-day has taken the bit between its teeth; and anyway, I think you will find that his parents will not object when they see that you love each other. So take your boy friend and be happy.

Dear Mrs. Morton:

I am a young girl two years out of high school, and live with my father and mother and married sister. My sister is eight years older than me, very pretty and witty, married and divorced. She seems to think all my company is hers too, as no one ever comes to see me that she doesn't stay round to keep things going, she says. Now, I'm perfectly capable of taking care of my boy friends myself, and I'll say I have quite a few, but the trouble is, my sister gets in her fine work and says and does all the bright things I would say and do if she weren't there. There's a certain young fellow who is my particular friend, but he's getting so he talks to my sister more than he does to me. And I've seen her trying to flirt with him, just to show she can. It even came to the point where he took her out one evening, and maybe I didn't hurry round to get some one to take me quick. Harry would be all right if my sister would let him alone. I suppose a woman who's been married understands men and knows just how to take them. Well, that's all right. She can have anybody else she wants for all I care, but she can't have Harry. She has to live with us, because she hasn't enough money to live anywhere else. My mother would be very angry if she knew I felt this way, but I think a girl has some rights. Harry hasn't asked me to marry him yet, and now it looks as if my sister was going to spoil my chance. She's had her husband, and she ought to let me alone to win mine.

Younger Sister.

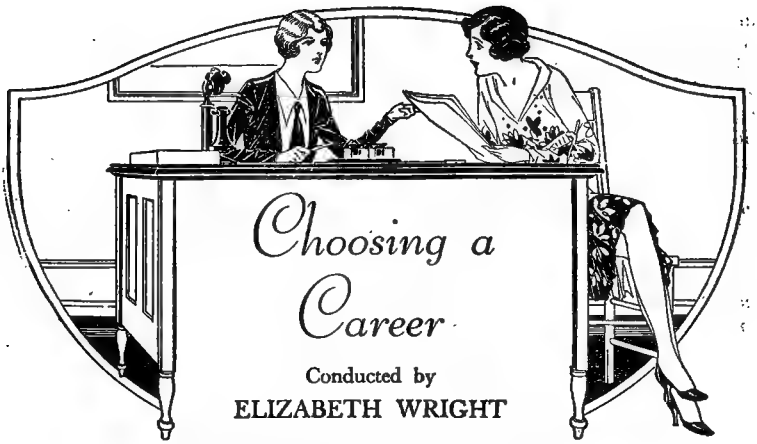
Well, this elder sister is in our way, isn't she? We'll have to do something to get her out. She must be either very selfish or very thoughtless, but it affects you the same either way. Now that she's had her innings, she shouldn't jump in on yours. Suppose you talk to her—an honest, straightforward, sincere talk, and let her see how you feel, and how she is spoiling your good times. She will be a poor sister if she doesn't keep out of the way after that. You are probably as pretty as she is, to your boy companions, and youth and beauty have a strong pull in spite of the sophisticated elder woman. You must have your own charm for your lover, and your sister can only step aside and give it a chance to act. Let me hear from you again.

TWINKLE TOES.—You mustn't think of suggesting such a thing. It would ruin your career. Try for the right place on the stage, make up your mind to stick and you'll pull through.

JOLLY SAILOR.—You will find the right one after a while. Don't get carried away by a pair of bright eyes. Good luck to you.

FAILURE.—There is no such word. Cut it out of the dictionary, and put this in your heart and keep it there: *Nothing* can make you even seem a failure unless you consent to be one—so you have it in your own hands.

LONGING HEART.—Think more of your duties and less of yourself. That is the best advice I can give you.



Choosing a Career

Conducted by
ELIZABETH WRIGHT

HAVE you found your ideal job? Are you satisfied with your present salary? If not, let Miss Wright advise you.

In these pages many new and attractive professions for girls are discussed. If one of these appeals to you, and you wish to learn more about it, address your letter to Elizabeth Wright, care "Choosing a Career" Department. A stamped, addressed envelope will bring you an answer by mail.

IN the world of the tea shop—that fascinating profession for the modern girl—the name of Alice Foote MacDougall is one to conjure with. Mrs. MacDougall to-day owns and operates numerous tea shops, as every one knows. All were built up from her first venture—not a tea shop, but the business of selling coffee.

"I began with the sum of thirty-eight dollars in cash," she told me. "I purchased a bag of coffee, had it roasted and ground, and sold it to my brother, clearing seventy cents on the transaction. In those days I could purchase coffee, raw, for eight cents a pound. Even paying the cost of transportation and preparation for the market there was money in it when sold for twenty-six cents a pound.

"I wrote letters to all my friends, and got other addresses from them. I also consulted the social register. My aim was to build up an exclusive clientele. I began with about forty actual customers.

"Selling attractively was one of my main considerations.

"To the girl who wants to get started I would say, first, select a necessity of life to sell, and second pick out a good location for your business. A good location is as essential to success as a good gown is to beauty.

"A girl asked me the other day if I thought she could make a living from the sale of peanuts, and I advised her to try it as a means of getting started. I also advised that her peanuts be especially selected from better growers, and be done up in packages which would give them an air. The giving of peanuts as chocolates are now given for gifts could be popularized by a

clever business girl. Never try to do anything that some one else is doing in just the same way. Individuality is the keynote to success.

"I see no reason why an ambitious girl starting in some such manner today might not reasonably look forward to entering the tea shop field eventually with success."

All tea shops, of course, are not situated in the large cities. In fact, some of the most profitable are to be found along the main arteries of motor travel throughout the United States.

ONE of the most successful tea shops I know of was started by an enterprising girl in an abandoned street car. The company gave her the car free for the hauling.

She hung out a sign—

HOT SANDWICHES FOR HUNGRY MOTORISTS

and armed herself with a license to sell food. Then she went to work.

She hadn't much cash. She put in a small secondhand stove, a mound of wooden plates, and pyramids of cheap tin cups, paper napkins and tablecloths, tin forks and spoons.

She found a brand of coffee that could always be kept hot without tasting stale, and she kept a big iron kettle full of perpetually boiling water. She was lucky enough to locate a huge iron pot second hand, and this she used to cook ears of corn, young carrots, or other quick cooking vegetables. For the rest, she bought staple foods like bacon for hot bacon sandwiches, and potatoes to be baked and eaten in the hand, picnic fashion.

The very first day she opened her unique tea room she sold out!

The next day she was prepared. It was raining, and she had plenty of hot egg sandwiches, hot sausage, hot biscuit. Also the second day saw a long table installed in the old car which ran the length of it, thus putting the ready-made car seats to good use.

This Week's Hint For Earning More Money

If you live where you may cultivate a little ground, here is a splendid way of adding to your income:

Start a "medicine garden"—a crop of medicinal herbs. One of the staples of this type of garden is the peppermint plant. These can be purchased of the mail order houses if you live in a rural district. The first year the beginner must enlist the aid of a chemist to teach her how to extract the oil, but once started she can carry on by herself. The oil is salable to chemists anywhere and will net a good profit.

In certain parts of the country belladonna can be grown, also the less difficult wintergreen, spearmint and catnip. It is best to consult a seed house when planning, in order that your particular locality be taken into consideration.

The home gardener, even the amateur one, can succeed here with little more trouble than if she were raising beans or turnips.

Now that she is successful she offers these attractive features to the passing motorists:

Boxes all ready filled with different selections of food from her regular stock, for the motorist in a hurry. These can be bought and eaten on the road. The food is *hot*, always. And each box contains hot tea or coffee.

Thermos bottles have come to be one of this girl's best selling articles.

Back of the little car is a reserved space for parking. If her customers wish to park there and picnic, she charges them fifty cents.

The second year of its existence the street car tea room had prospered so nicely that its girl owner felt justified in adding another old street car, to be used entirely for cooking.

In the winter an awning now protects her doorway and gives her customers a chance to reach her—for the awning is made of wrought iron and glass!

Not much cash is needed to start the ambitious girl in a similar tea shop of her own. The largest outlay will be for the rental of a suitable plot of ground on which to locate.

BY YOUR FAVORITE AUTHOR

"Mollymine," warned Juan, the adored bullfighter of Mexico, "we must lose no time! My two friends will witness—here is the minister—quick, where can we go?"

They made a dash for the purser's office—the minister rattled off the ceremony at a great rate—

Behind them the door was flung open and into the room plunged—

What was their danger? Why must the popular El Misterio, idol of the Mexican populace, and Molly, who loved him madly, be married before their pursuers could find them? Were they separated?

Find out for yourself in the next issue of ALL-STORY, on the stands October 30. Read the entrancing, enthralling novelette of love and danger in Mexico: "MOLLY'S MAN," by Marjorie Gleyre.

In Confidence

Practical First Aid to Everyday Living

Conducted by

DOROTHEA DALE

ANY question about the little problems that confront you daily in your business or social life Mrs. Dale will be glad to answer. No question is too small. Write her about anything that is perplexing you—how to word a letter, how to travel, what present to give, what to say and when, table etiquette, et cetera.

If an emergency arises and you need immediate advice your letter will be answered by return mail, if you will inclose a return envelope stamped and addressed.

All letters will be held in strict confidence.

Dear Mrs. Dale:

Another girl and I are going on an automobile trip, and since it is her car, I want to pay some of our expenses. We are intending to stop part of the time with friends and part of the time at hotels. Now, Mrs. Dale, I'd be ashamed to tell any one else, but all my life I've been bothered by not knowing just how much to tip. I have to be careful of my money, but don't want to seem stingy. Can you give me a guide in this? *Adelaide M.*

It's nothing to be ashamed of, for tipping is such a vexed question—and often a vexing one! You know, of course, that a waiter in a restaurant is supposed to get ten per cent of the bill as his fee. You give a quarter to the hotel porter or bell boy who carries your bags to your room, brings you ice water, and otherwise sees to your comfort. He gets another quarter when he helps to start you on your way again. The employee who takes the car at the hotel steps gets a quarter to drive it to the garage, and another when he delivers it.

The chambermaid is tipped according to the amount of work she does for you, and the maids at the houses of your friends likewise. For instance, if you stay only a night or two at one place, a dollar should be ample for you both, but if the maid does you any special service, such as washing or pressing, you should give her two dollars. Ten or fifteen cents is enough to add to a garage bill where the service has required very little work, more in proportion to the labor and time involved.

It is better to be too generous than

niggardly, of course; on the other hand, it is not sensible to tip extravagantly. The poor in this country are only too likely to tip too much, and the rich too little.

Dear Mrs. Dale:

Your department seems for ladies only, but perhaps you'll let a mere man in since his problem concerns a lady. I'm a mining engineer, ordered to Peru for two years, perhaps three, and there's a girl I love, but I've got to leave her behind me. Her mother thinks she's too young (19) to marry and go to rough it so far away. We aren't even engaged, and her mother won't let her accept the diamond wrist watch I got her. She says it's not proper to take jewelry from men.

Can you suggest a present that would be proper? I want to put quite a bit into it so it will last a long time and help to make her remember me.

Schuyler Brown.

Dear Mr. Brown, this department is for *everybody*, male and female, old and young, to make of it what you will.

According to the old-fashioned idea, books were the only imperishable gift a man could make a girl to whom he was not engaged. If your girl likes books, you can put almost any amount of money into them for her. Buy her a set of one of the classics in tooled leather, with a pair of lovely book ends to hold them. However, modern ideas are slightly broader (many mothers would let her accept that watch!), so if she does not enjoy reading, I suggest two or three handsome hand bags in different colors—for instance, one gray, one tan, and one dark blue or green — to harmonize with different costumes. Let one of these be very expensive, in hand wrought Italian leather, perhaps, or with very beautiful and complete fittings inside — the others more conservative, to use every day. Also, while you are away you may send her many little oddities typical of the countries through which you travel.

Here's hoping that you both "remember"!

Dear Mrs. Dale:

We know you welcome all newcomers to your wonderful department, so here are a couple of girl friends in South Jersey with a question for you. We were invited to dinner at a swanky house one night, and afterward wondered what is right. When you have cut up your meat, do you change the fork into your right hand and eat with it, or do you eat one piece with your left hand first and then change? One of us says one, and the other the other.

Kitty and Lora.

It is a very minor point, but you are both, strictly speaking, wrong. Only one mouthful of meat should be cut off at a time. Then use the hand that seems more natural. If you are sandwiching the meat in between bites of vegetables, use the right hand for all, but if you are eating the meat alone it is all right to convey it to your mouth with the left hand if you can do so gracefully. It might seem more awkward to change the fork constantly from one hand to the other.

Dear Mrs. Dale:

How shall I teach my little boy good table manners?

Mrs. B. S.

Example is the very best way—better than preaching or nagging or tell-

ing. If you and your husband are careful, no matter how tired or rushed you are, always to observe the rules, the child will naturally copy you. I know of one father, however, who was so distressed at a certain bad trait of his small son's that he bought a mirror and stood it on the table at the child's place.

The boy disliked the spectacle of himself and corrected the fault without further admonition. You might try this for a particular habit if nothing else avails.

Of course we do not ask every reader to tell us what they think of every issue of ALL-STORY, but we certainly do like to hear from each of you occasionally.

What do you think of this week's stories?

Do you find the departments helpful?

All of us—authors, editors, and department conductors—read over carefully each letter of criticism that reaches us. We want to entertain and help you, and your suggestions are our only way of doing so.

Tell us, by means of the coupon below, what *you* think of this issue.

THE EDITORS,
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway, New York City.

Here is my opinion of the stories in this issue:

Wooing Wings .....

Sanna's Star of Love .....

Fate! .....

Cupid Rides the Storm .....

Remembered Rapture .....

Yesterday's Lover .....

Saturday Night and No Date .....

Bride of the Dragon .....

The Charm Tutor .....

My favorite authors are .....

Name .....

Address .....

(Name and address may be omitted, if desired)